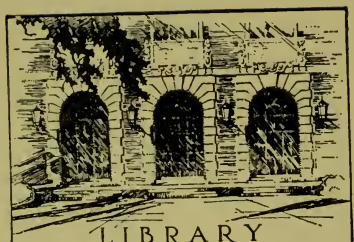
Thro' Love & War

by

Violet Fane



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THRO' LOVE AND WAR.

VOL. II.

THRO' LOVE AND WAR

BY

VIOLET FANE

AUTHOR OF 'SOPHY; OR THE ADVENTURES OF A SAVAGE,'
'THE EDWIN AND ANGELINA PAPERS,' ETC., ETC.

'Thro' Love and War,—by ways of Death and Doubt,
My soul has travell'd to the hoped-for Heaven.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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'THRO' LOVE AND WAR.'

CHAPTER I.

Very shortly after Lucy's departure for the North, Mr. Podmore had returned to Palmyra House, and he lost no time in paying a visit to his neighbour at Barlow Lodge. He seemed less put out than Miss Elizabeth had anticipated at her niece's second absence from home, although, according to his wont, he had made it the occasion for a few words of sound Podmorian teaching.

'I perfectly agree with you,' he remarked, after Miss Elizabeth had dwelt upon the advantages which Lucy would be likely to reap from an intimacy with persons of distinction; 'the dear childie ought certainly to acquire the manners and accomplishments of good society; but I would encourage nothing bearing the slightest resemblance to levity, and I would impress upon her,

above all, that the greatest discretion and circumspection should be observed with regard to the social relations between the sexes. This is,—I am told,—not sufficiently considered by the British aristocracy, and it would be extremely repugnant to my feelings,—I must confess,—in the future, if, on my return home after a day spent in honourable toil, I were to find some man of pleasure,—like this Lord Belmorris,—eating my plovers' eggs,—or lolling upon the sofa in my wife's pocket!'

Miss Elizabeth had never realised that it was indiscreet to eat plovers' eggs,—although,—to be sure,—it was rather an expensive taste,—nor had she, hitherto, associated 'lolling upon the sofa' exclusively with immorality. Something, however, in Mr. Podmore's tone had made both acts seem to her to be shocking.

'Oh, I can assure you, you are mistaken!' she protested eagerly;—'neither Lucy nor Lord Belmorris would ever dream of doing such things, I am convinced! . . . He is not at all the kind of person!' . . .

'I am delighted to hear it,' returned Mr. Podmore, patting his waistcoat, complacently. 'As you are aware, I have but little leisure to worship

at the shrine of fashion, and I must plead guilty to a total ignorance of the manners and customs of high life . . . But, by-the-by,—my dear Miss Barlow,—you who know so much about all the great ones of the earth,—can you tell me anything with regard to a young gentleman styling himself "Lord Falconborough?" I met him for the first time a few years ago,—and I have lately fallen in with him again,—quite accidentally. I must confess that the young fellow takes my fancy amazingly, and experience has taught me that Sydney Podmore is seldom mistaken in his estimate of character.'

'"Falconborough?" . . . "Falconborough?"' . . . repeated Miss Elizabeth, as though considering. 'Ah! yes! . . . Of course! . . . I remember . . . A *Viscount;*—of Norman extraction;—settled in England at the time of William the Conqueror . . . Not "*young*" however; . . . how, my dear Mr. Podmore,—can the present Lord Falconborough possibly be a *young* man?' . . .

'Not if he came over with William the Conqueror, certainly,' returned Mr. Podmore, smiling; 'this must be one of that old gentleman's descendants.'

Miss Elizabeth regretted at that moment that her 'Peerage,'—besides being so very old,—happened to be upstairs in her bedroom.

She taxed her memory, however, and finally recollected to have read of the death of a Lord Falconborough about two years ago,—without issue,—(of this she was perfectly certain,)—she had fancied that the title had thereupon become extinct, but yet had a dim notion that she had read something about his having been succeeded by a nephew. To have appeared doubtful would have been to display ignorance upon what had always been regarded as her strongest point. She answered,—therefore, with apparent confidence,—not knowing the importance Mr. Podmore might attach to her words:—

'Oh, yes! . . . Of course! . . . This young man must be the nephew of the late lord! . . . My memory must be failing, or I should have remembered the circumstance at once!'

Mr. Podmore seemed to be perfectly well satisfied with this explanation, and the conversation soon turned to other topics.

Mr. Podmore had met 'Lord Falconborough' in a railway carriage upon his way back from Liverpool. He had before had a slight acquaint-

ance with him,—having fallen in with him once, —in the waiting-room of a certain City usurer,— upon which occasion the young nobleman's affable manner had so captivated him, that, as they walked together out into the street, he had invited him to partake of luncheon with him at his club.

Mr. Podmore was already comfortably installed in the London train when 'his lordship' happened to enter the same compartment. At first, Mr. Podmore had failed to recognise him, — but Falconborough revealed himself almost immediately,—besides which, he was travelling already labelled, as it were, with his viscount's coronet emblazoned upon his dressing-bag, so that Mr. Podmore could not have remained long in doubt as to his identity.

A more agreeable companion than Falconborough during a tedious railway journey,—it would have been almost impossible to imagine. Mr. Podmore,—who, being something of a purist in speech,—had even experienced a difficulty, at times, — in hitting upon the most appropriate words for his purpose,—was greatly struck with his ease of manner and felicity of expression. It was altogether the manner,—he thought,—of

an 'hereditary legislator,' and,—(let the extreme Radicals say what they would about the indolence and incapacity of the aristocratic assembly of which this young man professed himself a member,)—there *was*, undoubtedly, something particularly fascinating in the conversation and bearing of most of our 'old nobility!' . . .

By the time that they reached London, Mr. Podmore and his fellow-traveller had apparently become friends for life. In his candid, good-humoured way,—which seemed to imply that he did not fear to take the whole world into his confidence,—Falconborough had touched upon his family complications,—his impending law-suit, and the injustice and rapacity of his relations. Mr. Podmore,—without fatiguing himself by following too closely all the ramifications of the narrative,—was much flattered at the young nobleman's condescension. He became acquainted, too, with a circumstance which seemed suddenly to reveal a whole group of new and advantageous possibilities.

Lord Falconborough,—notwithstanding his exalted social position, was,—pending the settlement of his family affairs,—on the look-out for some kind of honourable employment which

would ensure for him the enjoyment of a more liberal income. Could he be destined to become, in time, Mr. Podmore's 'light and attractive' element?—the 'young gentleman of fashion' who was to advance the interests of his 'house' in 'West-End circles?' . . .

At first the idea seemed almost too good to be true. But the more Mr. Podmore conversed with his agreeable companion,—the more feasible it seemed to become. Fearing to give offence, however, by any suggestion insulting to his lordly dignity, Mr. Podmore determined to broach the matter with extreme delicacy;—above all, to do nothing precipitate. He would study his noble friend,—discover what were his business capacities, and then,—some day,—after they had become better acquainted,—he would make him a proposal. . . . With this object in view, Mr. Podmore, with all the caution of a diplomatist, invited his lordship to dine with him at his club, where his irreproachable evening costume,—his intelligent remarks upon the subject of wine and cigars, and the obsequious manner assumed by the waiters, had worked together to confirm Mr. Podmore in the belief that he would prove a most valuable acquisition to his 'house.' The

dinner at the club had been followed by an invitation to dine and sleep at Palmyra House, which invitation had given his lordship 'great pleasure to accept.'

The two gentlemen went to Clapham by train, —early in the afternoon, and, as the day was exceedingly fine, walked to Palmyra House from the Junction. Mr. Podmore was determined that, to-day, if possible, he would sound his companion upon the subject which was occupying his mind. He felt a little nervous about it, certainly, for the 'employment' his lordship was seeking was, probably, of an altogether different character;—'Because I have condescended to talk to you about my private affairs,'—(Mr. Podmore feared that he might possibly retort,)—'that is no reason why you should assume that I am willing to become your dependant!'

During the walk from the railway station, therefore, Mr. Podmore was considering anxiously what would be the best method of approaching the subject, when he was assisted,—almost providentially,—(as it seemed to him,) by an incident which occurred upon the way.

Perhaps it was almost too trivial an occurrence to be dignified by the name of an incident at all;

but it became the means,—at any rate, of furthering Mr. Podmore's purpose.

As he and his noble friend approached the entrance to 'The Aspens,' Mrs. Van Buren crossed the foot-path, on her way to a carriage which was awaiting her. She was accompanied by her little girl, and followed by the black ayah, and by a boy-in-buttons carrying shawls and air-cushions, so that, for the moment, the pathway was completely blocked. Mr. Podmore and Lord Falconborough gave place to the procession, and remained standing whilst Mrs. Van Buren took her seat in her Victoria,—displaying, as she did so, a very neat foot and ankle. As she threw herself back amongst her cushions, she hurled a look of haughty defiance at Mr. Podmore,—recognising him, probably, as the new landlord, who, far from having shown her any civility, had openly expressed his desire that she should quit the premises even before the expiration of her lease.

'Fine woman, Podmore,' said Falconborough, looking after the carriage as it drove away. '"*Bel pezzo di carne,*" as they say in Italy!'

'Quite so;' returned Mr. Podmore although he understood not one word of Italian. 'But I

must tell you that this same "fine woman" is something of a thorn in my side. I will be candid with you,—for one good turn deserves another, and I have been deeply touched, I can assure you, by all the confidence you have reposed in me. To tell you the truth, then, my lord. . . .'

'Call me "Falconborough,"' interrupted the young nobleman condescendingly.

'Thank you; I shall be proud and pleased to do so— . . . . Well then, I must inform you that, although to a gay young fellow, like yourself, I probably appear to be the most confirmed and "humdrum" of old bachelors,—I have been rash enough to form an attachment. . . .'

'And the lady resides with you down here?' cut in Falconborough with an arch smile. 'Ah, my dear Podmore! you have destroyed my last lingering belief in human virtue!'

'Not at all! Not at all!' Mr. Podmore protested eagerly,—his brow clouding over for a moment. 'You have altogether mistaken my meaning! . . . . I am proud to say that no lady has ever suffered in name or in reputation through the instrumentality of Sydney Podmore, and I

sincerely wish that every young fellow of my acquaintance could say as much!'

'I sincerely wish that they could!' returned the 'young fellow' at whom Mr. Podmore seemed to be pointing his moral. 'But you know, *mon cher*,—we can't be *all* of us like Sydney Podmore!'

'Well then,' Mr. Podmore went on, dropping the didactic manner,—(for, after all, one ought, perhaps, to be prepared for a certain amount of license in the conversation of a young nobleman who must often find himself in situations of exceptional temptation!)—'I am old-fashioned enough, my dear Falconborough,—to believe in old-fashioned forms of contentment,—and I am of opinion that none of the wild and exciting pleasures of dissipation are to be compared with the happiness which may reign at the domestic hearth.'

'Hear! Hear!' exclaimed Falconborough, somewhat flippantly.

'With the object, therefore, of securing this form of contentment,' Mr. Podmore continued; 'I have already *almost* chosen the young lady whom I destine to become my wife. I have not yet broached the subject to her personally;—

desiring,—in the present unsettled condition of affairs,—to leave myself a loophole, through which it would be possible to retire in the event of any unforeseen occurrence interfering with the realisation of my hopes. I have, however, for years warded over her interests, directed the course of her studies, and protected her from all influences which might tend in the slightest degree to corrupt the natural purity of her mind. Residing as she does, with an aged maiden-aunt,—for she is an orphan,—this young creature is ignorant of the very existence of any of the pitfalls which may lie in her future path. She is visiting,—at this moment,—it is true, at the country-seats of some of her relatives;—for I was naturally anxious that she should acquire that tone and finish which can only be obtained by mixing in first-rate society, and these relatives are altogether tip-top people;—but, beyond this, no external influences have been allowed to approach her. Have I done well,—(I sometimes ask myself,)—in not preparing her more fully for the temptations of the coming strife? . . . . "You have done well, Sydney Podmore!"—(This is the answer which comes to me.)—"If, in the future, also, you can protect her with this shield of inno-

cence;—if, in the future,—when you and she may be joined together." ' . . . .

'In a word,' interrupted Falconborough, smiling; 'Sydney Podmore,—who is not even married as yet, is already dreading the inevitable destiny of almost every husband!'

He made a mysterious sign upon his brow with his two first fingers, as he spoke, which Mr. Podmore failed altogether to comprehend,—and the latter continued, in a more confidential tone:—

'But now, how about this Mrs. Van Buren,—(the lady we have just seen setting out for a drive,) and who will be residing in the next house but one to that occupied by my wife? . . . I cannot say that I know anything *positive* as to her or her antecedents,—and far be it from me,—although I may be as blameless as most of my neighbours,—to throw the first stone. But without making any inquiries as to her mode of life, three circumstances are patent to all persons possessed of ordinary powers of observation;—she is a woman who is separated from her lawful husband;—her establishment is conducted with lavish extravagance;—*and*,—she is continually receiving the visits of gentlemen!'

Mr. Podmore stopped at this awful climax, and looked for the effect of his words in his companion's face.

Falconborough gave a low whistle.

'You may imagine, perhaps,' Mr. Podmore went on, 'from my acquaintance with these facts, that I have demeaned myself to act as a spy upon this lady's movements,—but it is not so, Falconborough,—I can assure you! Had I the will,—I have not the time for such unprofitable employment. Scarcely a day passes, however, that I am not reminded by some circumstance,—trivial circumstances,—sometimes,—of her indiscretion and prodigality. Only last week, for instance,—(to descend to particulars,) an enormous barrel of native oysters is left at my door,—natives being,—now,—as I daresay you are aware,—at least three-and-sixpence or four shillings a dozen. My servants receive it without examining it closely;—I perceive it confronting me in my entrance-hall upon my return,—express astonishment,—deny all knowledge of it,—and,—finally,—upon examining the label,—discover that it is addressed to Mrs. Van Buren, and has been deposited at my house through an error of the carrier! Then, again,—yesterday,—looking forward, as I was,

to the honour of your company, this evening, at dinner,—I give orders to my cook to obtain from the butcher the best sweetbreads he can supply, and I even go to the trouble of expressing my wishes in writing. What happens, however? . . . . The butcher's boy arrives at the usual hour, bringing with him the joint, and the necessary supply of stock-meat. . . There is no sweetbread! . . . . My cook questions him. He replies,—on behalf of his master,—that he is very sorry to disappoint me, but that all his sweetbreads have been bespoken by "Mrs. Van Buren of The Aspens!" My cook telegraphs to me in desperation,—and I am compelled to bring down the sweetbreads with me from London,—wrapped up, as you see,' (and he held out a parcel carried in his hand,) 'in newspaper! . . . . These, however, are only isolated examples of a system which pervades everything. The greengrocer could tell you the same story with regard to early peas and forced asparagus;—the woman's expenditure must be enormous,—and what does a person separated from her husband, and dining,—presumably, — alone, — require with all these luxuries? From whom does she derive her income? This, however, is by no means the most

important aspect of the case :—Situated as I am, I should be unwise if I ignored the future. . . . In the future, then,—we will assume,—during my absence from home upon business,—my wife, —Mrs. Sydney Podmore,—strolls out upon the Common with her book,—and seats herself upon the bench, yonder,—under that clump of lime-trees immediately in front of Mrs. Van Buren's windows. What happens? . . . . Some smart young libertine from the West End drives down in a hansom-cab to visit this woman,—pulls up at her door,—observes my wife sitting upon the public bench,—(I don't mind telling you, my dear Falconborough,—that the young lady I have in my mind, is one of the loveliest girls in all Clapham,)—studies her habits from the windows of "The Aspens"—(for it is no secret that some of these gentleman-visitors have been known to remain there for several days,)—walks out upon the Common,—it may be,—next day,—upon pretence of a smoke, or what not,—seats himself upon the same bench with my wife. . . . *You*, Falconborough,—knowing the world as you do,—must perceive my meaning! You must perceive, at once, how anxious I am that a neighbour of this kind should betake herself from my immediate vicinity.'

'Do you suppose, then,' said Falconborough, —twirling his dark moustaches reflectively,— 'that this lady is really the fashion? That she is a person who is at present in vogue?'

'Of this,' returned Mr. Podmore, 'I know nothing. Upon such subjects I am profoundly ignorant, and I cannot regret that I am so. I am certain, however, that her visitors are gentlemen of no occupation, and independent means, by the time that their cabs occasionally remain at her door,—but this is neither here nor there. The question is,—How am I to get rid of her? . . . . How am I to let her know,—firmly and decidedly,—that I wish her to quit the premises at once?' . . . .

'I should think,' returned Falconborough, 'that you could scarcely proceed to any such extremity. The lady probably considers that she has as good a right to live here as you have.'

'But there is a feature in the case,' said Mr. Podmore, 'which, under ordinary circumstances, would make my course perfectly easy. The house in which this person is residing, has lately become my property, and I believe that I have a perfect right,—if I choose,—to eject her. I might, at any rate, give her fair notice to quit,—

using as a pretext a plan I have had in my mind for some time. I could tell her that I desire to knock down the partition-walls,—(for the smaller house which you see there,—to the left of "The Aspens," is also my property,)—in order to build a row of eligible modern mansions upon the site, —a project which it is really my intention to carry out, (D. V.) upon the death of an old lady who now resides in the smallest of the two houses.'

'I see that you are quite a landed proprietor,' said Falconborough. 'Well,—and what prevents you from availing yourself of your feudal privileges? In your place I should claim all sorts of autocratic "*droits du Seigneur!*"'

'I will tell you, my dear Falconborough;—even at the risk of making you smile! . . . All this would entail a personal interview,—*several* interviews, perhaps. Mrs. Van Buren is a dangerous woman; as you have just seen, she is not without personal attractions of an objectionable kind. It is evident that she readily obtains an influence over gentlemen. She might end by talking me over,—or making it difficult for me, at any rate,—to carry out my plans, and the acquaintance once made, what is to prevent

her,—in the future,—from calling upon my wife, and insinuating herself into her friendship? . . . I mistrust my own powers in the presence of the designing,—for Sydney Podmore,—although rather blunt and uncouth,—perhaps,—is, above all things, *honest and above-board. You,* my dear Falconborough,—are essentially a man of the world. It is not impossible that some such complication may have arisen in your path. What course of action would you advise me to pursue?' . . .

The two friends had sauntered on, past the entrance to Palmyra House, and had now reached the turning which leads to London by way of the Cedars Road. Mr. Podmore began swinging the parcel containing the sweetbreads in quite an agitated manner,—as though genuinely embarrassed as to what to do.

'I can only venture upon one suggestion,' returned Falconborough,—after a few seconds of seeming reflection. 'As you are so averse to confronting this syren yourself,—make *me* your Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary;—endow me with full powers,—and I'll answer for it that this little difficulty will soon be satisfactorily arranged!'

'My dear Falconborough!' exclaimed Mr. Podmore effusively, '*how* can I ever thank you sufficiently for your great kindness and condescension!'

What a delightfully considerate and complimentary manner of putting it! . . . No sort of hint of anything like servitude or dependence,—and Mr. Podmore himself raised, as it were, by a graceful figure of speech, to the same position as the Emperor of China, the Shah of Persia, or the Mikado of Japan! . . . . Lord Falconborough's remark, in fact, seemed to have removed mountains!

'I cannot tell you, my dear fellow,' said Mr. Podmore towards the close of this eventful evening, 'what pleasure it would give me,—if,—not only in the matter of Mrs. Van Buren,—but in all that concerns a certain portion of my affairs, generally—you could become my agent and representative! You will, no doubt, find punctuality and attention to business a little irksome at first, but, with patience and perseverance, a young gentleman of your fine intelligence and first-class education, ought to be able to carry everything before you. There will be,—at any rate,—I think I may say,—unlimited confidence upon

either side, and I need hardly tell you that it is my desire to make our little scheme one of mutual advantage.'

So the bargain was struck that very evening, as Mr. Podmore and his guest sat together,—after dinner in the smoking-room at Palmyra House, whilst the shrill tones of Mrs. Van Buren's metallic *soprano* were wafted across Miss Elizabeth Barlow's narrow garden, and in at the open window;—for, notwithstanding that it was now the middle of 'chill October,'—when, 'natives,'—as Mr. Podmore had remarked,—were still three-and-sixpence, or four shillings, a dozen,—the night was as warm as many nights in an English June,—and Mr. Podmore had thrown open the window to let out some of the tobacco-smoke.

'I should wish that woman out of the way,' he said, as these sounds reached his ears, 'were she as virtuous as Lucretia! . . . We have all suffered long enough from her abominable screeching!'

Falconborough only smiled languidly by way of reply, and took up the air in his clear and melodious tenor. Certainly, (Mr. Podmore thought,) the evening had been a complete success, and his young friend was one of the most well-bred and fascinating of men.

CHAPTER II.

'I TELL you what, my dear, *this will never do!*'

The speaker, in this instance, was not Mr. Jeffrey of the *Quarterly Review*, but young Algernon Binks. He had gone into the morning-room at Belmorris Castle where he found his sister alone. She was leaning back in an arm-chair by the fireplace, with her feet upon the fender,—apparently deeply engrossed with the *Morning Post.*

'*What* will never do?' she asked with the raised eyebrows of inquiry.

'Why, the way Lucy Barlow's going on! Just take the trouble to get up and look out of the window, now! I declare it's almost enough to send a fellow off his head!'

'Well, I don't see anything *so very* awful!' Adeliza returned,—after she had looked out,—as requested, and reseated herself by the fender. 'I suppose Uncle Belmorris has asked her to go

with him to the stables, as they've turned down that way. Perhaps he'll take her out riding, later on. I'm sure she's taking a deal of trouble off my hands by keeping him amused, for he's so fearfully punctual, and active, that it's generally pretty hard work!'

'My heavens!' exclaimed Algernon. 'Girls *are* selfish! You don't seem to have the slightest feeling about the honour and glory of the family!'

'I don't see that what Lucy's doing now can have any effect upon the family honour and glory! She isn't interfering with *me* in any way,—or spoiling *my* chances! It's a merciful dispensation that she didn't cast her spells over Charlie Sparshott,—but one can't "carry on" with one's own uncle!'

'She mayn't be spoiling *your* chances,' replied Algernon irritably,—'and I suppose that's the only thing you care about,—but she's most decidedly spoiling *mine* as fast as she can! . . I tell you what it is,—my dear!' he added in a tone of ominous prophecy; 'my Uncle Belmorris 'll marry her!'

'Oh, he *couldn't* be such a born fool!' Adeliza exclaimed, looking a little startled nevertheless. 'I shan't believe it till I find myself in Church,—figged out as a bridesmaid!'

'There you are again! Always thinking of yourself and your dress! . . . No thought for your unfortunate brother,—reduced to beggary,—very likely,—and all his future prospects entirely ruined!'

'Oh, I forgot that, Algy! . . . But you don't really think that he'll marry her? We shall have to get up a plot to prevent it.'

'There's only one way that I can think of,' said Algy, as he toyed pensively with his incipient moustaches; 'though I've been turning the matter over in my mind for very nearly a week, and that is . . .'

'To get up a flirtation with her yourself? . . . Not at all a bad idea, and to tell you the truth, I rather fancied you *had* done so, already! . . . But men are strange creatures! . . . It might only have the effect of bringing him on. Sometimes, when they fancy a thing's going to be taken from them, they seem to care about it all the more!'

'Yes, I know;—it would be a very ticklish game,—so I've given up all idea, now, of proposing to her myself!'

'Of *proposing* to her!' . . . I should think so, indeed! What would Mama and Uncle Belmorris have said to *that*, I wonder!'

'I shouldn't have cared much for what they might have said,' returned Algy, looking rather crestfallen. 'I liked Lucy Barlow, awfully. She's a girl I think I could have stuck to,—(if I'd married her,)—and settled down with,—and all that, and not been bored. And I think—never having been "out" much,—and knowing nothing of the world, she wouldn't have worried one, or asked questions, or found out things, and been jealous;—and so,—to tell you the truth,—one day last week, the day that she and my Uncle Belmorris came back from riding so late, in a brougham,—and pretended that they'd gone through all sorts of adventures,—I *did* propose to her in a kind of a way, just before she went out—but she wouldn't hear of it at all,—having her mind fixed, no doubt, upon much higher game,—for I believe she awfully fond of me,—*really*. She said, however, that we were a great deal too young, both of us, and shouldn't have half enough money.'

'There she showed her good sense,' remarked Adeliza; 'and I must say I respect her for it. I fancied she was more of the moonshiny, sentimental sort. But it's a great thing for a girl,—particularly for an orphan,—to begin by being a

little mercenary,—besides which, you know, we all intend *you* to marry an enormous heiress!'

'I don't feel quite so sure about this enormous heiress that you're always talking of!' returned Algy, rather despondingly. 'You know when you first came out, you said you were determined to marry a Duke,—but, you see, *you haven't!*'

'I was a little ambitious, at first,' said Adeliza in an off-hand tone; 'but then, that's just as it should be! It doesn't do,—in this world,—to hold one's self too cheap. However, it's no good striving after the impossible, and I declare, now, I think I could be almost content with a Baronet!'

'It's a tremendous come down,' replied her brother; 'but I can't help thinking you're about right. If I was a girl, I'm sure I'd much rather be happy with a Baronet than miserable with a Duke!'

'That's a very noble sentiment, Algy; but I'm afraid that noble sentiments don't pay! As long as we "go in" for being people of fashion, it's our duty to strangle our better feelings, like serpents! But I've *got* them, sometimes, just as much as *you* have. I can see how hollow and contemptible most of my own ambitions are,—and I remember that somebody says,—some-

where,—that when one confesses one's self guilty,—one is on the high-road to becoming innocent. But I mean to give worldliness a chance for a year longer. At the end of that time,—if I'm not married,—I've made a vow that I'll take to "good works," and try how *that* answers! . . . I'll become a district-visitor,—or something of that kind, and you'll see me trudging all over Belgravia with a basket!'

'I don't think,' said Algy,—'that that's at all in your line! . . . I fancy that Lucy Barlow,—with all her flirting is more the kind of girl for "good works." If I were you, I think I should stick to the Baronet.'

'Ah! . . . that reminds me! . . . Did you go into the gun-room and look out what I told you to, in "*Burke?*"'

'About Charlie Sparshott?'

'Yes; to find out whether he's the eldest, or youngest, son, of Sir Timothy Sparshott. I heard him say that his father had only had two boys.'

'I looked him out, yesterday,' returned Algy, 'as you told me,—and I find he's Sir Timothy's second son.'

'Gracious heavens! . . . And I've been behaving just as if he'd been the eldest!'

'He's a second son,' repeated Algernon, assuming an arch expression; 'but, . . . his elder brother was drowned at sea!'

'Thank goodness!' cried Adeliza, fervently; 'you made my blood positively run cold! . . . I was afraid I might have gone too far!'

'I only meant it for a "scare,"' Algy explained; 'but, now look here;—I've helped you with this, and I want you to help me with your womanly wisdom about Lucy Barlow, and my uncle Belmorris.—You know Hepburn?' . . .

'Yes; of course! Why, he was dining here only yesterday!'

'I mean, you know about him and Lucy? . . . You saw,—of course,—that she's carrying on a sort of flirtation with him as well?' . . .

'I saw,' replied Addie; 'now that I come to think about it,—that she seemed rather absent and excited after she heard he was expected, and that she took much longer than usual dressing for dinner. She asked to come into my room, too,—to look at herself in the long glass,—which she's never taken the trouble to do before.'

'Well,—I can assure you that's it! . . . She and Hepburn have got something between them, I'll take my oath!—I watched them the whole

of dinner-time, and they behaved just like two people who're in love,—but who want to humbug each other, and pretend that they're not.'

'Colonel Hepburn isn't a marrying man,' said Adeliza, quoting a phrase she had often heard repeated.

'I'm not quite so sure about that!' replied Algy, in a tone of superior wisdom. 'You see, you've never been a man yourself, and so, you can't know as much about men as *I* do! He mayn't have been a marrying man *once*, and he may have become one *now*, from circumstances! Sometimes a fellow of that kind gets tied up early in life with some one he can't marry, generally some other fellow's wife, or something of that kind, don't you know, and that's awfully apt to keep him single; for, though you girls seem to enjoy carrying on with two or three people at once, it's a beastly bore for a man to find that he's on with his new love before he's off with his old! . . . But, very often, after a bit, he gets sick of the old love, or she, very likely, dies, or bolts off with some other fellow, and then he's just as keen to marry as anybody else; and I shouldn't at all wonder if Colonel Hepburn hasn't been in some fix of this kind.'

'And what makes you think that he's got out of his fix now?'

'Because I believe he's spoony (in *his way*) upon Lucy Barlow, only he's an awfully proud, reserved kind of fellow, and ashamed to show it. Besides which, you know, he may be afraid of "spoiling sport," or of taking the wind out of my Uncle Belmorris's sails. Now, my plan is, to give Hepburn a hint, in order to bring him on.'

'I should think that would be rather a delicate matter,' said Adeliza; 'as you say, he's fearfully proud and reserved. I'm sure I don't envy you your mission!'

'Oh, I've made up my mind exactly how I'm going to begin,' returned Algy, confidently. 'He's coming over here, to-morrow, isn't he, to shoot, and to stay for two or three days?'

'Yes; he's coming over with Charlie Sparshott.'

'Very well; now, last night, after you and Lucy Barlow had said good-night, Hepburn's man kept them waiting some time for the carriage; we all went into the smoking-room, and there Charlie Sparshott and my Uncle Belmorris very soon fell asleep. . . .'

'Charlie Sparshott soon fell asleep?' repeated

Adeliza quickly, as though wounded at the notion that her admirer should court oblivion so shortly after he had basked in her smiles. 'I must say, I rather wonder at that! . . . Did you discover whether he snores? . . .'

'I wasn't thinking about him at all,' returned Algy. 'I was wondering whether I shouldn't begin giving Hepburn "the straight tip;" I ended, however, by thinking I'd better put it off till another time, for I was afraid, just as I'd got into the full swing of the thing, the servants might interrupt me by coming to announce the carriage.'

'And so you never said anything at all?'

'No; and it turned out I was quite right; for Hepburn and Charlie Sparshott had to be off in twenty minutes. But I mean to speak to him the next time the same thing happens, as I've no doubt it will, every night whilst they're here; only, I must just watch Hepburn's and Lucy's goings-on for the first day or two,—so as to make sure that I wasn't mistaken. I've settled just how I'm going to begin, but I don't quite know which would be the best line to take afterwards, and want your advice about it. I don't know whether I ought to take the line of coming for-

ward,—(as Lucy Barlow's nearest male relation,) and asking Hepburn what the devil he means by trifling with my cousin's affections if he isn't in a position to marry, and all that;—or, whether I'd better simply appeal to him upon the question of my own prospects, and say, "Now, look here, Hepburn, you know *you* had an uncle once, hadn't you? who seems to have left you uncommonly well off. Wouldn't you have cut up rather rough if, after you'd been brought up to expect the best part of his fortune ever since you were a youngster, you'd seen him just on the point of making a born fool of himself by going and proposing to a girl of nineteen or twenty?" . . . Something of this kind, I fancied, would be the best way of broaching the subject.'

'I think that way would be better than the first way,' said Adeliza; 'I don't think, at your age, Algy, you could possibly ask a man like Colonel Hepburn his intentions, before you are even sure that he has any! . . . You might only make him awfully angry, and put everything out!'

'Well, goodness knows, I'm not particularly anxious for Hepburn to marry her,' returned Algy; 'I'm too spoony upon her myself for that!

But I'd rather he proposed to her to-morrow than that my Uncle Belmorris should go and make a fool of himself and of *me* too! . . . Anyhow, I think my plan will make a sort of diversion. Even supposing Hepburn can't marry, it may make him more keen about her if he finds out that some other fellow's in love,—because that's just the way with us men;—and he may flirt with her more, at any rate; and then, seeing that he's a younger, better-looking fellow, and all that, and that Lucy prefers him, (as I really and truly believe she does, for she's probably only carrying on with my uncle from interested motives); then, very likely, my Uncle Belmorris, who's always been used to having it all his own way with women because he's a lord, may turn sulky, and sheer off, don't you know; and so long as he doesn't marry her, and spoil my future, I don't care one brass farthing whether Hepburn marries her or not; in fact, if I had my choice, I'd rather she remained as she is. What do you think of my project?'

'I don't think it's a bad one at all. It can't do much harm, and it *may* do good; but I'm glad I'm not you, to have to speak to Colonel Hepburn. He's about the only man I was ever afraid of in my life!'

'I don't think, my dear,' said Algernon, 'that he ever seemed to have much fancy for *you!*'

'Perhaps,' returned his sister, as she glanced complacently at her reflection in the chimney-glass; 'one mayn't ever have taken any trouble to *make* him "fancy" one! From the very first, one always heard that he wasn't a marrying man; and I've a perfect horror of people who're no good!'

'Well, I think we shall soon find out whether he's really a marrying man or not,' said Algy.

Adeliza was still contemplating her image in the looking-glass.

'Don't you think it's a very odd thing, Algy,' she remarked after a while, 'that a middle-class girl like Lucy Barlow (for really and truly, she isn't anything more; they say, you know, that her grandfather was only an Alderman), living right in the middle of Clapham Common, should exercise such a tremendous power of fascination over every man she meets, from *you* upwards,—or rather "*downwards,*"—I suppose I ought to say! I wonder whether it's magnetic, or what it is, and where in the world she gets it from?'

'I should think,' replied Algy, turning, also, to the contemplation of his face in the glass, 'that she gets it from the Binkses!'

But, at this moment, a faint hacking cough, apparently rather the result of habit than of chest-affection, made itself heard, and Lady Mabella entered the apartment, wearing her usual resigned and expiatory expression. She held a clean, black-bordered pocket-handkerchief in one hand, whilst with the other she tightened her hold upon the skimpy shawl which covered her narrow shoulders. Mrs. Guffy, almost similarly attired, and, seemingly equally woe-begone, followed behind her mistress, bearing wraps, and a small basket, containing lozenges, smelling-salts, sal-volatile, and other restoratives for failing powers.

The dejected aspect of both mistress and maid seemed to produce, at first, rather a depressing effect upon the two young people, whose countenances underwent a decided change. They rose, however, and embraced their parent respectfully.

'I hope, Mama dear,' said Adeliza, 'that you've had rather a better night?'

'Thank you, dearest,' answered Lady Mabella, sighing; 'I can most truthfully declare that I don't think I have once closed my eyes! From the extraordinary noises I heard during the night, I feel morally convinced that there must have

been an enormous rat in the room. I remember there used to be rats. . . .'

'Hurrah!' cried Algy unfeelingly, 'we'll go and rout him out with the terriers!'

'Dearest Algernon!' murmured his mother, plaintively; '*do* control your unaccountably high spirits, and speak a little lower! I suppose his voice must be cracking, isn't it?' and she turned helplessly to Adeliza. 'Is that what makes it so dreadfully loud?'

'I think it ought to be mended by now, Mama,' Adeliza answered. 'It seems to have been cracking for such a very long time! I think it must be his natural voice.'

'Oh, I trust not!' returned Lady Mabella; 'for that would be too distressing! Dear me; how terribly draughty this room is! I think the window must be open in his lordship's study.'

Lady Mabella proceeded wearily to settle herself upon the sofa, whilst Guffy went into the adjoining room to investigate the cause of the draught.

'I have closed the window, my lady,' she said presently. 'Does your ladyship require anything more?'

She spoke with the manner of a person whose

time is of value, and who dislikes wasting it upon trifles.

The basket containing the restoratives had been placed upon a small table within reach of the sofa, together with some pretence at needle-work, and the wraps and cushions seemed to be all satisfactorily disposed.

'My poor feet feel terribly cold,' remarked her ladyship wearily. 'I think you must have forgotten to put the cork-soles into my shoes.'

'I beg your ladyship's pardon,' replied Guffy; 'I remember putting them in perfectly well.'

But in the meantime Lady Mabella was investigating the matter with her own hand.

'Ah! I see what it is!' she exclaimed regretfully. 'You have put in *one* of them and the other, which is far worse than forgetting them both, as one feels the contrast terribly!'

'I could have taken my solemn oath,' returned Guffy, looking much annoyed; 'that I put both of them in! After this, I shall never be sure of anything again!'

'I suppose,' said Lady Mabella, making a feint of moving, 'that I shall have to go up and fetch it myself?' and she heaved the sigh of a martyr.

'Your ladyship knows,' rejoined Guffy sternly,

'that I am only here to wait upon your ladyship,' and she quitted the room with some show of irritation.

'One would have fancied,' remarked Lady Mabella, as soon as her attendant was out of earshot; 'that a servant who had lived with one for over twenty years, might have got to know one's habits!' and she sighed again.

'The fact is, mother,' cut in Algernon, 'Guffy's getting a great deal too old and too lazy! You ought to look out for a much younger maid. You'd find her a deal brisker.'

'Thank you, Algernon,' returned his mother, with a smile which, in anyone less dejected, might have been suspected of containing a germ of humour; 'I select my maids for my own convenience, and not for your amusement!'

'We must wait till your voice has done cracking, Algy, before getting a young and good-looking maid,' said Adeliza playfully; 'you're just now at the most susceptible age; isn't he, Mama?'

'I'm sure I don't know, dearest!' replied Lady Mabella wearily. 'He *may* be, but I don't know, and my poor head is so painful, that I feel quite unable to enter into a discussion!

Young people must settle these matters their own way; I have my own opinion, of course, but I am anything but strong, and I was so terribly disturbed by that rat!'

She closed her eyes for a moment, sprinkled some *eau de Cologne* upon her handkerchief, and passed it over her brow.

'I am sure no one can think less than *I* do about my poor miserable self,' she murmured after a while; 'but I should very much like to know,—merely out of curiosity,—what this agonising sensation can possibly mean?'

'I remember,' said Algernon, 'that Dr. Winnington told Addie and me that it was "one of the myriad forms of indigestion."'

'Dr. Winnington could never have said anything so obviously untrue!' returned Lady Mabella, a little sharply. 'How could he have divined that that wretched Guffy would have neglected to put in my cork-sole, and would have sent all the blood up into my poor head through causing me to have such icy feet?'

'Lucy has gone round to the stables with Uncle Belmorris,' remarked Adeliza, changing the subject abruptly.

'That is well!' replied her ladyship absently.

'She will help us to entertain those two dreadful men! When do they arrive?'

'To-morrow afternoon,' said Adeliza; 'and Mama dear, I've found out all about Captain Sparshott.'

'Indeed, dearest! I am glad to hear it! Oh, where is that miserable Guffy?'

'Captain Sparshott is the second son of Sir Timothy Sparshott,' said Algy. '*I* found it all out; but his eldest brother was drowned at sea.'

'That is well,' returned Lady Mabella dreamily; 'I mean,—poor young man,—that, as we could not have prevented it, it is, perhaps, *better*. . . . .'

'It happened a good many years ago,' said Adeliza. 'I should think, by now, they had all of them got over it.'

'My Uncle Belmorris says that Sparshott Priory is one of the jolliest places in Ireland,' remarked Algy; 'and that they've got first-rate trout-fishing.'

'I am glad of it,' replied Lady Mabella feebly. She took a prolonged sniff at her smelling-salts, as though to brace herself for some unusual effort, and then added,—

'My dearest Adeliza, I *think*,—I *almost* think, —that it would be as well if you did not appear

to have heard of this sad catastrophe whilst Captain Sparshott is staying here; I *think* it would be wiser to appear to believe that he is still a younger son. In life, these things are sometimes better, when good may come of them. Perhaps I do not make my meaning very plain, but my poor head is really splitting!'

'I quite see what you mean, Mama dear,' returned Adeliza quickly; 'you mean that this will make us appear to be more disinterested, supposing that he "means business."'

'I almost forget what my meaning was, dearest,' replied her mother vaguely; 'my mind is in a terrible state of chaos, but I know that I was intent upon your welfare!'

'It's a first-rate notion, mother!' cut in Algernon, looking knowing. 'And you'll see how well we'll follow your advice. "We must dissemble!"'

'You see, Algy,' observed Adeliza afterwards, when Lady Mabella, wearied out with the exertions of the morning, had once more retired to her own room; 'even *Mama*, who pretends to be so awfully particular about propriety, seemed to think it perfectly natural that Lucy should go about alone with Uncle Belmorris.'

'*Sisters* don't always believe that girls are so ready to make love to their brothers,' replied Algy in a marked tone; 'they're apt to hold their brothers' powers of fascination rather too cheap! Besides which, she was thinking about her cork-soles.'

'Shall you really speak to Colonel Hepburn about it?' Adeliza asked, as though wondering at her brother's temerity.

'Yes; I've thoroughly made up my mind,' returned Algernon doggedly. 'I shan't speak out the first day he's here,—but, perhaps, the second,—and, *certainly*, the *third*, and I think you'll see that after he's heard my candid opinion, matters will, somehow, be brought to a crisis. I can't go on any longer sitting upon thorns!'

CHAPTER III.

When a woman, after much longing and many prayers, meets again the man she imprudently loves, without having received from him any of those assurances which she can never grow weary of hearing repeated,—when, after days of vain expectation, and nights during which he may be revealed to her in dreams, she beholds him once more as he is in the flesh,—hears,—once more,—the ever-haunting tones of his voice, but sees him and hears him,—in the restraining presence of others,—guessing only at what may be hidden away in his heart as he touches her hand formally for one little hurrying moment,—when, after he has bidden her a constrained farewell, and the sound of the hoofs and of the wheels that are bearing him from her, have died away in the distance,—she seeks, in her desolation, the solitude of her chamber, and reviews every moment of the long-hoped-for 'day that is dead,'—is not

disappointment,—cruel and bitter, because seeming to be as irremediable as it was undeserved and unexpected, the dominating feeling of her crushed and despairing heart?

Lucy Barlow, who knew nothing, until the morrow, of Lord Belmorris's invitation to his country-neighbour to stay and shoot at the Castle for a few days, or of how this invitation had been readily accepted,—experienced some such painful emotions, when she had retired to her solitary chamber, upon the evening when Colonel Hepburn and Captain Sparshott, his brother in arms, had driven over to dinner from Falconborough Park.

He was gone now,—*for good*,—as she sadly imagined,—Falconborough must be certainly nine or ten miles from the castle,—even by the very shortest way,—and it was unlikely, therefore, that he would come over again whilst she and the Binkses remained at Belmorris. And he had said no word to her;—he had given no look or sign which might have satisfied, in some measure,—at least,—the intense longing of her heart! . . . True,—she had not seen him alone for a single second,—and the words she hungered for were scarcely such as could have been uttered in public, —but surely,—surely,—if he had cared for her in

the very least, he would have allowed her to learn this blissful knowledge from the depths of his wonderful eyes which could say so much sometimes? . . . Had he quite, quite, forgotten those enchanted moments in the shadowy cloisters at Hampton Court? . . .

Lucy's apartment at Belmorris had nothing about it which could have helped to sadden even the most gloomy imagination. It was a small bachelor-room, with a bright brass bedstead,—the curtains of which were blooming all over with blossoms, and fluttering with butterflies. If Lord Belmorris had searched through his entire castle with the special desire of selecting the most comfortable and cosy-looking room, he could scarcely have succeeded better in his object. Nevertheless, upon the evening when Colonel Hepburn had dined and departed, Lucy passed many miserable hours under these same blossomy bed-curtains.

'He is gone! he is gone!' . . . was the sad refrain that seemed to be chanted and wailed close to her sleepless pillow from dark to dawn. But then, on the morrow, came a joyful and unlooked-for revulsion of feeling.

'He is coming! he is coming!' the same spirit-voices seemed to be shouting and singing

triumphantly during the whole of the following night. 'He is coming over to stay for a few days to-morrow, accompanied by Captain Sparshott!' and the voices only ceased when she fell into a delicious slumber, brightened by hopeful visions; —and then,—lo and behold! 'to-morrow' had grown into 'to-day!' . . . .

Colonel Hepburn and his military friend rode over from Falconborough Park, and reached the door of Belmorris Castle at about four o'clock,—a dog-cart, containing their portmanteaux, arriving shortly afterwards. Lucy's bedroom,—by a fortunate chance, was situated immediately over the principal doorway,—and, from this vantage-ground she was enabled to witness both these arrivals. Every detail connected with Colonel Hepburn seemed to her to be fraught with an absorbing interest,—down to the very initials upon his baggage,—whilst Captain Sparshott's portmanteau,—notwithstanding the first-rate trout-fishing at old Sir Timothy's,—was hauled down almost unnoticed.

Lucy observed that the armorial bearings upon the blinkers of the horse which was harnessed to the dog-cart, were the same as those engraved upon the back of the sacred hair-brush with which

she had smoothed her tresses upon a certain memorable evening. They consisted of a horse's head,—bitted and bridled,—the ancient cognisance of the Hepburns of Bothwell and Hermitage,—and a falcon, hovering over its nest, for Falconborough. Was it likely that the great red lion-rampant of the Barlows would ever enter into a polygamous union with these two illustrious heraldic beasts? . . . .

Upon his arrival, Colonel Hepburn condescended to partake of tea, which was already prepared in the gun-room, and which was handed to him by Adeliza Binks. Captain Sparshott,—preferring a 'B and S,' was likewise accommodated in the same apartment, and here it was that Lucy, having ventured tremblingly downstairs, was once more confronted with the man she loved. There was the same formal grasp of the hand as yesterday,—the same calm words of ceremonious greeting. Hope, however, was lurking in Lucy's heart, for was he not going to remain on at the castle for several days? . . . .

Lord Belmorris,—who had been scrutinising her very closely,—so Lucy fancied,—during this disappointing hand-shaking,—but then,—at such moments,—she had lately grown to imagine that

she was always unusually observed,—now proposed that they should go out for a stroll in the park before dinner. Adeliza, who had not yet removed her walking-apparel, started off with her brother to accompany them, but Lucy, who, in an evil moment, had taken off hat, jacket, and thick boots, felt too timid to propose that they should wait whilst she equipped herself anew,—and so, had the disappointment of watching them depart without her.

Adeliza led the way briskly, with Captain Sparshott,—Colonel Hepburn and Lord Belmorris following at a more leisurely pace,—whilst Algernon Binks straggled along in an unpaired condition, for the gravel pathway was scarcely wide enough for three. Perhaps,—after all, she would only have had to walk with him,—and this would have been no very unusual pleasure! . . . .

Before they arrived at the iron-gateway leading out of the flower-garden,—Colonel Hepburn paused,—looked back at the house, almost as if he had forgotten something, and was about to return. Lucy's heart,—as she watched him from the window,—began beating tumultuously. What if he were to come back,—leaving the others in the garden,—just to whisper the few kind words for

which she hungered? How easily it could have been done,—and without inviting the slightest suspicion! . . . *A woman*,—in Colonel Hepburn's place, would certainly have managed it! . . . But Colonel Hepburn was not a woman. The impulse, —whatever it may have been,—passed off,—and she saw him continuing his way with the others.

As soon as they were out of sight, Lucy seated herself in the chair lately vacated by the Colonel, and endeavoured to read the morning papers. The house, however, seemed suddenly to have become terribly lonely. Lady Mabella was at home,—it is true,—but she was resting upstairs in her own private apartments. Guffy was,—of course,—at her tea, with the other servants,—but the housekeeper's room was too far off for any sounds from it to reach the occupants of the upstairs sitting-rooms. In a very short time, therefore, the feeling of solitude became too oppressive for her to endure, and, going up to her bedroom, she arrayed herself in her walking-costume, and went out of doors.

After passing through a part of the flower-garden,—she took her way through the rookery, —crossed the carriage-road, and found herself in a wood beyond, which was intersected by many

pathways. Thick bushes of laurel, box, and rhododendron, grew upon each side of the way, so that the now half-naked branches of the trees beyond were scarcely discernible in the deepening twilight. Lucy had often wandered about in these shady pathways before,—it was a spot favourable to 'maiden meditation;' and the rustling of the withered leaves, as she flitted along, seemed like a fit accompaniment to her thoughts, which,—it must be confessed,—had been somewhat sad and desponding of late.

By-and-by, she became aware of a louder and more continuous rustling. Some one was following in her footsteps. She looked round, and found herself face to face with Colonel Hepburn.

Just heavens! . . . He was alone: she could perceive no signs whatever of the rest of the party! . . . .

She felt paralysed in every sense. No word escaped her lips, and her heart began to behave as it invariably *did* behave in Colonel Hepburn's presence. Fortunately, he very soon put an end to the embarrassing silence.

'So you prefer your own company to ours, I see, Miss Barlow,' he said as he came up with her. 'Belmorris, finding you weren't with us, has gone

back to look after you. May I ask if you always go out for these solitary strolls?'

'Sometimes,' Lucy answered, helped by his conventional tone into making a supreme effort over her emotion. 'Twilight is the time I like best in the whole day. I can always *think* better then.'

'And might one enquire,—without appearing to be presumptuous, whether your thoughts are pleasant ones?' he asked, with a kind of mock-formality which, in some circumstances, is so particularly irritating and disheartening.

Lucy was now no longer trembling and embarrassed. Colonel Hepburn's manner,—almost a manner of condescending banter,—as it seemed to her sensitive ears,—had re-awakened her slumbering pride. She regained her presence of mind, though her heart felt sore with disappointment.

'My thoughts are not always pleasant,' she answered, calmly and seriously. 'How can they be? There seems to be a great deal in the world which is very sad and very cruel.'

Tears were in her eyes, but happily, it had grown too dark for him to see them.

'Poor child!' he murmured, in an altered voice. —'Surely no one can ever have been cruel to *you?* Your life ought to be all brightness and hope!'

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Again that same parental, abstracted, irresponsible tone, which had chilled her blood more than once before! . . . He stopped, however,—took her hand,—and looked down earnestly into her face. . . . .

But just at this moment the withered leaves began to rustle tumultuously, and Algernon Binks came scampering down one of the intersecting paths.

'Ah, there you are, Lucy!' he cried, in his discordant boy's voice. 'We've been hunting for you all over the place! . . . Here she is!' he called out to his sister and the Captain, who were now seen emerging from an adjacent grove. 'My Uncle Belmorris has gone all the way home to look for you!'

Poor Lucy's heart seemed to grow cold in her bosom. Colonel Hepburn, too,—she could not help fancying,—looked a little annoyed.

They retraced their steps to the castle by a different way to that by which they had set out,—Adeliza walking on first, as before,—with Captain Sparshott. Colonel Hepburn and Lucy loitered some distance behind them, whilst Algernon Binks kept fastening on to, and disturbing, first one couple, and then the other, and proving,

—if the truth must be told,—about an equal annoyance to both.

Upon emerging from the rhododendron-grove, they found themselves upon the brink of what was almost a ravine,—the decline of which was richly wooded with forest-trees. Notwithstanding the advanced season,—some of these were still clothed with foliage, coloured in brilliant autumnal tints. A grey vapour clung softly to the side of the valley,—concealing the full extent of the declivity, and beyond this, a wild and picturesque tract of country lay mapped out before them, extending in every direction as far as the eye could reach, and seeming to be utterly indefinite in the subdued light of a newly arisen crescent-moon.

Adeliza Binks,—in spite of having strangled all her æsthetic leanings upon the altar of fashion, was aware that this view was generally much admired, and was determined that Captain Sparshott should not miss seeing it,—if only for what Algy had called 'the honour and glory of the family.'

They contemplated it with varied feelings,—for some seconds in silence. Colonel Hepburn was the first to speak.

'This is one of the finest views in England,' he said; 'I know of hardly any other that is to be compared to it.'

'I don't suppose it's any finer than the view on Clapham Common,' remarked Algy archly; 'eh, Lucy?'

'*Clapham Common?*' repeated Colonel Hepburn, looking at him quickly. 'Why Clapham Common?'

'Because that's where my cousin lives when she's at home,' replied the irrepressible Algy. 'Isn't it, Lucy? . . . and she's always telling us how beautifully the moon rises there, and how grandly the sun sets, and how little we cockneys know of its perfections, although it isn't half an hour's drive from London in a hansom.'

'I can't help liking my own home,' returned Lucy simply; 'there's a quiet, old-fashioned feeling about it, which one realizes the charm of after one has lived there for some time, although, of course, there's nothing that can be compared in any way to this.'

'I had no idea,' said Colonel Hepburn, as they turned from the moonlit landscape, and continued their homeward way, 'that you lived anywhere near Clapham Common. You never told me before.'

'I didn't think you would care to know. It was not because I was ashamed of my home.'

She spoke with dignity,—almost with sternness.

'He does not care for me,' she was thinking bitterly. 'He could break anyone's heart and then not know that he'd done it! Why should I become the slave of one who cannot understand?'

They were alone again,—for a few minutes, at least; for Algy had walked on with his sister and her admirer. Colonel Hepburn seemed to wish to hang back.

'Upon which side of Clapham Common do you live?' he inquired gently.

'Upon the side which has its back turned to London and the river,' she answered. 'I suppose being so very near a large town, and yet outside it, is,—really,—what makes it seem to be so far away from it. Sometimes, when I listen, in the evening, to the chimes from the London churches, and then look at the grey walls of our little garden, I feel as if they completely shut us off from all the rest of the world.'

'Your garden,—I suppose,—is at the back of the house,—upon the side which does not look out upon the Common?'

'Yes; but we have a little strip of garden upon the Common side,—as well,—and a beautiful lime-tree with a seat under it. When the evenings are fine, I sometimes sit a long time at the window and watch the people playing at cricket,—as my room looks out that way.'

'The early mornings are very pleasant there, too,' remarked the Colonel, absently. 'I shall be sorry when anything happens to those old lime-trees.'

'You know Clapham Common then?' she said, pausing, and looking up at him suddenly. She was thinking of the mysterious figure,—so like him in every respect, which she had seen seated one morning, upon the public bench nearly opposite her own door,—and wondering whether it had been really an optical delusion after all.

'Of course I know it,' he answered carelessly; 'as your cousin says,—it isn't half an hour's drive from London in a "hansom."'

'But you know it well?' Lucy insisted timidly. 'You sit, sometimes, under the lime-trees upon the Common in the early mornings?'

'Have you any particular reason for asking this?' he inquired, as though impressed by her earnest manner.

'I fancied, once, that I saw you,—that's my only reason. There is a group of seven lime-trees nearly opposite our windows, with a bench under them,—and I looked out one morning, and saw a man sitting there who seemed to be just like you. But his back was turned to me, and, afterwards, I thought I must have been mistaken; but now, I was wondering whether it mightn't have been you after all.'

'It's quite possible that I may have been upon Clapham Common, now and then,—in the summer,' returned Colonel Hepburn vaguely. 'There's an old fellow living near there, who travelled with me, long ago,—as a kind of tutor, and I run down and look him up sometimes. So your house is just in front of those seven lime-trees?'

'Yes; it's a quiet, peaceful-looking little Queen-Anne house, standing between two much larger ones. I shouldn't think that you would have observed it.'

'I shall observe it in future, if I ever happen to be near there again! And is it as quiet and peaceful *within* as it looks outside?'

'Yes; the *house* is peaceful enough,' she answered, 'and my Aunt, who, though she is so old, has never had any troubles,—is peaceful and

contented too. It is a house that seems meant more for peace and quietness than for *happiness;* —everything seems to be so old-fashioned and toned down.'

'But *you* are happy there?' he asked, stopping again, and looking searchingly at what he could perceive of her in the growing darkness. 'Why did you sigh as you spoke? Tell me, once, that you are not unhappy? Ah, if you only knew how much I wish for your happiness!' . . .

What more he might have said will never be known,—for at this moment Lord Belmorris made his appearance in the dusky pathway. He was whistling,—not always,—with him,—a sign of high spirits,—and flicking at the leaves of the laurel-bushes with his stick. Lucy and Colonel Hepburn started in rather a guilty manner, and then went forward to meet him.

'Well, Miss Lucy,—you're a nice young person, I must say!' he exclaimed. 'What have you to say for yourself,—giving us the slip, and then leading me a regular wild-goose chase to try and find you?'

Lucy feared that he was really angry with her from his tone, which, considering his kindness to her during her stay beneath his roof, was the very

last thing she would have desired. She commenced, therefore, to explain her conduct, in somewhat faltering tones, but before she had proceeded far with it, her cousin Algernon again appeared upon the scene.

'Lucy wasn't up in the mother's room,' he said to his uncle, 'where you said I was to go and look for her, whilst you searched downstairs,—and the mother was in an awful wax at being woke up, though Guffy said she wasn't really asleep,—but, when I came back, I found her in the "King's Walk" with Colonel Hepburn.—Didn't I, Lucy?—I didn't go back and tell you, because we thought you'd be sure to turn up.'

Lucy acquiesced faintly. Somehow, this afternoon, her nerves seemed to be terribly unstrung!

'Now, what have you to say for yourself, Miss?' asked Lord Belmorris, knitting his dark brows with sham severity. All the others had gone on ahead, and he was walking with her towards the house, which was now close at hand.

'Oh, *please* don't be so angry with me!' she pleaded. 'Surely you know that I wouldn't have offended you willingly!'

Lord Belmorris perceived, to his surprise, that she was in tears.

'Why, what a brute I am!' he exclaimed with contrition; 'I've actually made you cry! . . . My dearest child! Say that you forgive me!'

He, too, paused,—just as Colonel Hepburn had done, and took her hand tenderly and remorsefully. Lucy became confirmed in her impression that life was assuredly full of the strangest contrasts and complications.

'It's not for me to forgive!' she faltered,—feeling sadly at a loss for words. 'There's nothing for either of us to forgive;—only, . . . only . . . I fancied you were really angry with me, and I was so sorry, because you have always been so very kind!' . . .

'I wasn't in the least angry,' he answered, drawing her hand through his arm and stroking it paternally; 'besides,—if I had been, it wouldn't have mattered two straws! You're quite right to prefer Hepburn's society to that of the rest of us,—for he's a very clever, well-read, agreeable fellow,—besides being so good-looking. It's a pity he isn't a marrying man!'

CHAPTER IV.

The second day of Anthony Hepburn's sojourn at Belmorris Castle brought Lucy as little solace as the first. The men went out shooting during the greater part of it,—returning to the house soon after four o'clock. Then ensued a few conventional words,—having reference to subjects without much interest to a young lady in Lucy's emotional state,—a stroll in the twilight,—with Lord Belmorris or Algy making an unwelcome third, — and, afterwards, — dinner, — to which Colonel Hepburn escorted Lady Mabella,—Captain Sparshott taking in Adeliza, and Algernon straggling in,—as he generally did,—unprovided with a female. Poor Lucy,—paying the penalty of remote relationship rather than of greatness, was taken in first,—upon the arm of the master of the house, and found herself, thus,—the furthest removed of anybody at table from the object of her affections. At these critical epochs

of existence, one is prone to cling to the slenderest straws of comfort, and so, she may have derived some sort of consolation, perhaps, from the fact that, when the moment came for the ladies to retire for the night,—it was Colonel Hepburn who, having accompanied them to the foot of the staircase, graciously took upon himself to light, and hand to her, her bedroom candlestick,—gazing lingeringly after her retreating form as she took her way upstairs out of his presence. But, in spite of this unimportant incident,—her horizon appeared still to be clouded over with apprehension and uncertainty.

Then, sadly and swiftly,—as such terrible days have a way of dawning,—came the day upon which he was destined to depart. He was going away from her again,—leaving her no tangible evidence of his interest or affection to cling to, but the lighting of a miserable bedroom candlestick! . . . . She was physically weakened from having, alone, and quite unaided,—done battle with so much disquiet. The last two nights had been almost,—if not entirely,—sleepless; and Lord Belmorris seemed to be quite distressed at the failure of her appetite at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner. When,—she asked herself

despairingly,—would this uncomfortable state of affairs come to an end? . . . .

It transpired soon after breakfast, however, that, although Colonel Hepburn and Captain Sparshott were,—of a truth,—about to leave the Castle, it had been arranged that the two young ladies should make an expedition to Falconborough for the day,—accompanied, of course, by Lord Belmorris and Algernon Binks, as their natural protectors. The weather, although anything but warm, was so fine that there was every reason to suppose the 'outing' would be an agreeable one, as the fine old Tudor house, with its historical and family pictures, was well worthy of a visit.

The party set out immediately after luncheon in a waggonette, with Algernon Binks upon the box, instead of a footman.

It was not possible during the drive for any of the occupants of the waggonette to talk confidentially, and the conversation turned, therefore, merely upon general topics.

Upon entering the lodge-gates of Falconborough Park, Lucy gazed eagerly about her, for the night was so dark when she had visited it before, that its beauties were entirely new.

'How different everything looks,' she exclaimed, presently, 'by daylight, to what it does at night!'

The words escaped her almost unconsciously, more as if she were thinking aloud than addressing her companions.

'You have been here before then?' said Colonel Hepburn,—seeking her eyes inquiringly.

Lord Belmorris,—in a few telegraphic sentences, gave a rough account of his and Lucy's adventure, of which, to her surprise, she found that the Colonel had not been informed. His servants had, apparently, said nothing to him about it as yet, and Lord Belmorris was not the sort of person to volunteer information, unless it was particularly required of him. Colonel Hepburn, therefore, seemed to experience something of the same kind of surprise that Lucy herself had felt upon discovering his familiarity with Clapham Common.

'I am afraid that there will be nothing for me to show you that you have not already seen!' he said, as he helped her out of the waggonette, when they had arrived at the door.

'We only went into one room, *downstairs*,' she replied, 'for all the others seemed to be shut up,

and I should so much like to see the portraits of—of—your relations.'

'*Ancestors*'—she thought, afterwards, might, perhaps, have been a wiser and more appropriate word. But she had spoken the truth. He had grown so unaccountably dear to her, that her tenderness seemed to reach back, and enfold, even his father and mother, and she desired to see what these unknown loved ones had been like in the flesh.

They all passed together into the entrance-hall, which was lofty and oak-panelled. There was a glass door leading into an old-fashioned flower-garden, at the further end of it.

'If you would care to look round the garden for a few minutes,' said Colonel Hepburn, leading the way to this door, and then opening it, 'I will just take Miss Barlow to look at the pictures before the light goes. I think you have all seen them,—such as they are,—but I don't know whether Miss Binks has ever heard the echo in the old orangery:—Sparshott's a capital hand at setting it going!'

He spoke carelessly, but there was something determined in his tone. Lord Belmorris looked up at him as though a little startled at his

proposal. An expression of annoyance passed for a moment over his face. He stood as though irresolute, upon the top step, showing no sign of going into the garden. Lucy almost feared that he was about to accompany her to the pictures. Adeliza Binks, however, and Captain Sparshott, had darted out, and were now on their way to evoke the echo. Algernon was nowhere to be seen, and Lord Belmorris, as uncle and chaperon,—may possibly have felt bound to hover within sight of his niece and her admirer. Be this as it may, he gazed for a second in Lucy's face,—with a look that had in it something of a mute appeal,—and then, slowly, and as if reluctantly,—went down the stone-steps into the garden.

Lucy Barlow and Anthony Hepburn were alone.

'Should you *really* care to look at the pictures?' he asked, as soon as Lord Belmorris was out of hearing.

To Lucy,—whose perceptions were quickened to intensity, it was as though he had said, openly—

'Looking at the pictures was merely a pretext. Our first desire was to be together;' and now it occurred to her that his reserve as regarded out-

ward expression,—might proceed from a consciousness of the mutual sympathy which had become established between them, and which seemed to him, perhaps,—to render words superfluous.

'I should like *really* to look at the pictures,' she answered, aware, in every fibre of her being, of this tacit understanding.

'Come then,' and he led the way to the library, in which she had found herself once before.

Passing on together through this room, they entered a long gallery beyond, in which the pictures had been arranged by the late Lord Falconborough with care and intelligence. The descriptions,—together with the names of the masters, were painted upon the frames. There was no need, therefore, of explanations, and Lucy and her host went over them in silence. By-and-by, however, they came to a picture which was undescribed and unnamed. It was by a comparatively modern artist, and represented a Jewish money-lender,—in turban and spectacles,—seated at a counter strewn over with knick-knacks, whilst a beautiful young widow, with an infant in her arms, was offering him the miniature of her husband for sale. An older child was cling-

ing to her garments, and gazing at the usurer with frightened eyes.

'The meaning of this picture,' Colonel Hepburn remarked, and in his tender and concentrated tone there was nothing to dispel Lucy's idea about the mysterious sympathy existing between them; 'can be interpreted in several different ways, and for this reason, it seems to me, one doesn't grow tired of it. Sometimes I fancy the painter meant merely to illustrate the trials of poverty. This poor woman may have been devoted to her husband; his portrait may be almost her only remaining treasure; but the children require bread,—they are more to her, even, than the picture; the picture must go! . . . . This is one reading of the subject.'

'And the other?' inquired Lucy, almost in a whisper.

'The other you will, perhaps, think, could only have occurred to a cynical mind, and I suppose I only take this second view when I am in a morbid state. At such times, I fancy that the widow is too becomingly dressed to be really poor; she has gold earrings, you see, and a fine large cross on her neck. Why not dispose of these trinkets before she parts with the picture?

. . . . No! I daresay she never cared a straw for her husband! . . . . The ornaments may serve to attract some new suitor. Let the portrait go first!'

'But yet,' said Lucy, forgetting herself for the moment, and taking the part of the young widow; 'her face looks so dreadfully sad, and she holds forward the picture so reluctantly. I think she must really have cared for him!'

'I don't attach much importance to the sad look,' returned Colonel Hepburn, seeking her eyes inquiringly; 'for I always thought that a woman could make her face sad or gay, just as she fancied, without any reference to her real feelings.'

Lucy thought that he must have said this merely to test her, and determined, therefore, to reply with discretion.

'Some women may be able to pretend,' she answered; 'but surely some are to be believed?'

'I hope so; till now, however, I haven't been much of a believer.'

'I am sorry to hear that. Perhaps the women you knew best were not truthful.'

The words escaped her almost unawares. Colonel Hepburn seemed to wince for a moment.

Lucy feared that she had, perhaps, aroused some painful memory.

'I think,' he said, after awhile, 'that women nearly always desire to convert one from every kind of unbelief, whether it be in Heaven, or in themselves; because a woman, whether truthful or the reverse, is generally kind, and, being kind, she will desire that you should derive happiness from the sources that have proved a comfort to herself; and, to *her*, it is everything to believe. I like to think that good women, however, do not always care for the best men.'

'Why?' she inquired, wondering.

'Because most men, I should think, would rather be loved by a good woman than a bad one; and because men are generally so full of failings that no good woman could ever love them if she cared only for perfection.'

'I should think,' returned Lucy, 'that if a woman once really cared for anyone, she would forgive his failings, however much she might regret them.'

'Do you think,' he said, suddenly, in an altered voice, 'that a good woman could ever care for a coward?'

'A *coward?*' repeated Lucy, looking at him inquiringly.

There was an expression of pain upon his face. She was at a loss, in spite of her quickened senses, to divine his meaning.

'Yes; *a coward*,' he answered, sadly. 'I am interested in your reply, because I have discovered that I am a coward myself.'

'*You* a coward!' exclaimed Lucy in astonishment. 'I heard that you had been in battles, and fancied that you were so brave!'

'My body is tough enough, I daresay, and I'm not much afraid of physical pain, but, *morally*, I am a miserable coward. Without displaying personal cowardice, a man may sometimes find himself in a position where a bold stroke would put an end to much that he feels to be both irksome and humiliating, and he may yet be wanting in the courage to strike.'

He spoke with the manner of one who is about to make some sort of painful confession. Lucy was thrilled to the soul at this seeming proof of his confidence.

'I have heard that men dislike annoyance more than *we* do,' she answered. 'So, perhaps, a man might go on bearing what was painful, if to put an end to it would entail doing something unpleasant.'

'Yes; some men carry this to an extreme; and, as they have to bear the consequences of their own acts, they are generally more than sufficiently punished. But there are cases when this want of moral courage may bring suffering *to others*,—to those they care for more than they do for themselves; you can understand this?'

'Yes; I understand it, although I know nothing of what may be in your mind. In such cases a woman, I think, would feel herself obliged to strike the blow, and go through the annoyance, however great; but then, women are so different from men.'

'But, supposing, in striking this blow for the sake of one you loved, as well as for your own peace of mind, you felt that you were behaving with heartlessness towards a third person,—some one who had given you proofs of friendship and affection, and to whom you were under certain important obligations,—in such a case, might not even *a woman* hesitate?'

'Would to act as you would like to act, annoy this friend very much?' Lucy inquired.

('Perhaps,' she thought, 'he has some uncle or cousin who would be injured by his marrying,

—possibly his next heir,—and this may be why he has never married before.')

'It would do more than annoy, perhaps,' returned Colonel Hepburn, still speaking with great earnestness; 'it might cause real pain, and, for this reason, the man who is a coward recoils from striking. The blow will have to be dealt some day, but he delays and temporises.'

'But it must be struck some day for certain?'

'For certain, I think,' he answered. 'When, in life, events take particular turns, one can perceive their tendency as surely as one perceives that a river must flow towards the sea. The man who is not morally brave, is always hoping for this time, and dislikes hurrying what is inevitable.'

'He is too impatient to wait for the end which must come?'

'No; he would wait for it for years and years, if only he could be sure that it would really come; but, unfortunately, life is short, and the time during which it can be enjoyed is shorter still. It would be selfish, perhaps, to make sure of one's happiness, but might it not be foolish to let it escape one altogether? A man may reason like this sometimes, and then, come what may, he feels impelled to seize his happiness *now*.'

He gazed at Lucy as he said this, as though his entire destiny hung upon her answer.

'What would you do,' he asked presently, 'if you found yourself in this man's place?'

Lucy endeavoured to turn the matter over, dispassionately, in her mind, but before she had decided upon her answer, he said suddenly,—

'Have you ever read Tennyson's "Idylls of the King?"'

'About King Arthur and his knights? Yes; I have read most of them. In my room at home there is a print of "Elaine" floating down the river in her barge after she is dead.'

It was strange (she thought), that he should speak to her about these poems, when, upon the very first occasion of her meeting with him, she had likened him, in her mind, to Lancelot 'the great knight,—the darling of the court!'

'Well,' continued Colonel Hepburn, speaking still with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand; 'read over again the one called "Elaine," there are some lines in it which may tell you more than I am able,—more than I dare explain.'

'You are telling me something about yourself?' Lucy inquired.

'Yes; for I should like you to know the worst of me. But we will say no more about this now. Let me show you the picture of one of the best women in the world.'

They went back again into the library. Colonel Hephurn stopped beneath the full-length portrait of a lady in a white dress. She was represented standing at the foot of a broad staircase, with one hand upon the head of a large dog.

From the reverential expression which came into his eyes, as well as from the resemblance which existed between this portrait and the miniature hanging in his bedroom, Lucy was quite prepared for his explanation,—

'This is my poor mother.'

They both looked up at the portrait without speaking.

Lucy experienced a strange awed feeling. It seemed to her almost as if she was being presented to Colonel Hepburn's mother upon approval, and she felt quite nervous as to what the beautiful lady in the white dress might think of her.

'You see, she was quite young when this was done,' he said at length; 'but she looked still young the last time I saw her. She had nothing

of the "mother of the Gracchi" about her, and from the moment I became a soldier she was always in terror lest I should be killed.'

'I can fancy,' returned Lucy, 'how dreadful it must be for a mother or a father to lose their child.'

'Yes; I fancy it's the strongest instinct Nature has implanted in us,' he replied; '*except one.*'

He looked at her intently as he said this. Lucy was thrilled by his gaze, and painfully confused. It would have been almost a relief to her, at that moment, if some one had entered the room and broken the spell; for she felt that those appealing eyes were gazing down into the very depths of her soul, and that ere long they must read her secret. It seemed ages before either of them spoke again, during which time Lucy experienced a sensation as if her heart was running a race with the library clock, trying hard to beat it, and succeeding. Suddenly, a new light seemed to break in upon her.

'Do you mind my asking you something?' she faltered. 'Are you married?'

'No, I am not married,' he answered; 'I swear it!'

'But do you care very much for any one?—some one you cannot marry?' she asked, breathlessly; 'ah, pray tell me the truth!'

'I am not married,' he answered; 'and I love no one but you, so help me God! Surely you must know this! Tell me, my Lucy, that you can love me too?'

He drew her to him. For a moment she was in his arms.

'You know!—you know!' was all that she found voice to murmur. 'You have known it for a long time!'

'Then I may think of you as my own Lucy?' he said tenderly. 'But for the present we must keep our secret to ourselves. Come, let us go into the garden.'

He took her hand in his, and led her back through the deserted rooms, and she felt that he knew that she loved him.

. . . . . .

'I must say, Algy,' remarked Adeliza to her brother, upon their return to Belmorris after the expedition to Falconborough Park; 'that I don't think much, after all, of your boasted valour! Here's Colonel Hepburn been, and gone, and yet you've never mustered up courage to say anything

to him about his attentions to Lucy, which I must confess are becoming a little marked! Did you see the cool way, to-day, in which he led her off into the library under all our noses? Uncle B. was awfully roughed up by it, and vented some of his ill-temper upon poor me, by watching Charlie Sparshott and I whilst we were listening to the echo, just as if he'd been a detective. He'd much better have gone indoors and looked after Lucy!'

'I'm not quite blind!' returned Algy, complacently; 'and I saw everything just as plainly as you did; but I've come to the conclusion that I can express myself better in writing, so I'm going to fire off a letter to Hepburn to-morrow morning by the early post!'

CHAPTER V.

True to his promise, immediately after breakfast upon the following morning, Algernon Binks seated himself at the library writing-table. He selected a new quill pen,—with a broad nib, and a sheet of emblazoned writing-paper, of the consistency of cardboard;—for his letter, although friendly in tone, was intended to be of a very firm and determined character.

The opening words,—'My dear Hepburn,' flowed from his 'grey goose-quill' glibly enough, but, arrived thus far, he paused for some time, and it was not before he had bitten off the end of the pen, and stroked his beardless chin repeatedly with the stump, that he was enabled to go on with his composition.

He advanced, even then, but slowly, for he was neither a very good hand at writing nor at spelling, and he felt called upon, in a letter of so much importance, to make use of a good many hard

words. When completed, too, the paper was so marred by erasures and corrections, that he decided upon treating it merely as the rough copy, and it was very nearly post-time, therefore, before it was actually finished. When finally corrected and approved it ran as follows :—

'My dear Hepburn,

'I take up my pen to address you upon a delicate subject, which I should have placed in the hands of some one more experienced in such matters, if my cousin, Miss Lucy Barlow, had not been, as she is,—an orphan, with no male relations living except me. I expect by this beginning of mine, you will be able to guess the drift of any remarks I may think fit to make to you, and that you will take them kindly,—like the good fellow that I really believe you are,—in spite of what ill-natured people may say to the contrary. One has always heard, that, for some reason best known to yourself, you were not considered a marrying man; of which I was informed by my sister as long ago as when we were all staying down at Hampton Court in the summer. Now, being a man like yourself, I know, my dear Hepburn,' (I had better treat him quite in an affectionate, brotherly, way,—at any rate till he turns

nasty, thought Algy to himself, as he wrote this,) . . . 'I know, my dear Hepburn,' (he continued,) 'that lots of little temporary entanglements may occur, which prevent one's wanting to settle down till one has had one's fun,—but, after all, these affairs are very easy to wind up or "square,"—particularly when a fellow is as rich as you are; and once a fellow has sown his wild oats, he is generally just as ready to marry as any other fellow. Both my mother, Lady Mabella Binks,—my sister, and myself,'—('I think,' he soliloquised, 'that it wasn't a bad move, bringing in Mama's name, for we want rather to frighten him, and he won't know that she doesn't take the slightest interest in anything except her complaints!') . . . 'My sister and myself,—have remarked the attentions you have paid my cousin Miss Barlow, and I am writing this with a view to some sort of explanation of your conduct,—which I cannot describe as gentlemanlike or above-board, if you are not in a position to behave honourably to my cousin,—as I have no doubt you will think proper to do upon consideration. But, dear Hepburn,' (the term of endearment was here inserted to console the Colonel for any pain which might have been caused by the

severity of the previous remarks,) . . . 'there is another side of the case to be looked at which equals, if not surpasses, the first. It is this; viz.:—If you do not make my cousin Miss Barlow an offer, it is my firm belief,—as sure as I am sitting here in this chair,—that my Uncle Belmorris *will*, and I am as sure as anything, also, that, if he does so, he will be accepted like a shot, for an Earl with over forty thousand a-year, and decent-looking besides, and not too old,—does not propose every day to a young lady whose face is probably her only fortune, although she may be lively, and good form, and all that, as I am sure you will agree with me that my cousin Miss Barlow is. But now,—in this case, my own position will really be one with which I should expect you to sympathize with, and to help me out of, if it is in your power, as you have had the good luck to escape from the same kind of danger yourself.

'Belmorris Castle, and most of the landed estates, together with the title, will go,—at the death of my uncle,—to his first cousin,—a fellow he has hardly ever seen, and who is, besides, a parson;—but there are three or four very nice farms, and a whole pot of ready-money, saved

up, and got by racing, &c., &c., but which would be settled if he married, upon his younger children. I have always been looked upon by my mother, Lady Mabella,—as heir to this nice little fortune, as her younger sister, happily, did not leave any children before she died; and I appeal to you, my dear Hepburn, as to whether you would like, in my place, to see your own nose put out of joint in this unexpected way. It is my candid opinion, being a fellow to keep my eyes open, that, though my cousin would, of course, accept my Uncle Belmorris if he is fool enough to propose, and has been flirting with him, perhaps, and keeping him on, and all that, that, in reality, she very much prefers *you*, and that, as you are, also one of the best matches in the county, I feel sure she would at once accept you if you made her the first offer; for "a bird in the hand" is, as we all know, "worth two in the bush." I warn you, therefore, my dear fellow, for your own sake, if you are at all "hard hit," and if you mean business, to go in and win at once, if you are in a position to do so with clean hands, and I hope you will excuse me for having taken the liberty of giving you the "straight tip." Excuse, also, bad writing, and any mistakes I

may have made with my spelling. I am studying, as you know, for the Army, and am going in for one modern language besides Latin, which makes me a little shaky, now and then, with my English, and, with my kindest regards to Sparshott,

'Believe me to be

'Yours very sincerely,

'ALGERNON BINKS.'

Lucy, in the meantime, could neither eat, sleep, nor think, (save upon one subject,) for very gladness of heart. All night long, she lay in a state of beatitude, thanking God for the great blessing that had befallen her, and when, next morning, she tripped down to a pretence of breakfast, she felt as if she was treading upon air instead of stair-carpet.

Some few of us, perchance, may have experienced the same enchanting sensations, which are, usually, sadly evanescent. Such emotions, however, might wear out our fragile organizations by reason of their very intensity, were they to be of long continuance. Let us be patient, therefore, under the Supreme Decree! . . .

'I suppose no one in the whole world was ever

quite so happy as I am!' she thought to herself, remarking at the breakfast-table 'the loveless looks of other men' as represented by Lord Belmorris and Algernon Binks. His lordship, certainly, appeared to be more silent and preoccupied than usual. Possibly, (Lucy thought,) he might have had bad news from his racing-stable. He ate next to nothing, seemingly preferring his tooth-pick to anything more substantial, and the little family-furrow, which was his sister's constant companion, had established itself upon his brow, as if for good.

Algernon Binks, on the contrary, did ample justice to the viands that were set before him, but he was meditating upon the important letter which he had determined to write as soon as his appetite was appeased, and so, was not in his habitually talkative mood.

Now, it was the custom at Belmorris Castle, soon after the morning's post had arrived, to set out the letters upon the billiard-room table. Sometimes the guests were able to obtain these before breakfast, but, seeing that they were dependent upon the speed of the postman, and upon the will and pleasure of the servants, they could never make altogether sure of doing so.

Lucy had not heard, for some days, from her great-aunt, and, in spite of the delightful frame of mind in which she now found herself, she had not forgotten this fact, and so, betook herself to the billiard-room as soon as the morning meal was over.

The letter she had expected was there; Miss Elizabeth Barlow was well, Mr. Podmore, too, was in the enjoyment of good health, and had been receiving company. Mrs. Pilchard, the cook, had had a visit from her brother who was a soldier. Sarah had, unfortunately, caught a severe cold, which had settled in her face. . . .

There was, however, another letter upon the billiard-room table, which bore, likewise, the Clapham post-mark. It was addressed to Colonel Hepburn at his own country-seat; 'to be forwarded' was written upon it, however, and the Falconborough servants must have sent it on to Belmorris, where, by some postal carelessness, it had arrived just too late to reach him before his departure.

As she happened to be alone in the room, Lucy took up the letter and feasted her eyes upon the beloved name. It would not have been in human nature to have resisted so great a tempta-

tion. The writing, she remarked, was rather spidery and scrawly, the characters of a woman, rather than of a man, but what riveted her attention most was, that the envelope had an exceedingly deep black edge.

Who could it possibly be from? Without being in the least of an inquisitive nature, this question naturally occurred to her.

She had often thought, with deep interest, about Colonel Hepburn's familiarity with Clapham Common, and of how he had accounted for it by the circumstance that 'an old fellow' lived near there who had once travelled with him as 'a kind of tutor,' and whom he was accustomed, occasionally, to 'look up' in the summer. Could this 'old fellow,' (she had since wondered,) be her dear friend the Marquis de la Vieilleroche? . . .

He had travelled,—of this he had informed her,—with several young gentlemen of position. Had Anthony Hepburn been one of these? . . . The letter before her was certainly not in the Marquis's handwriting, but might it not be, possibly, in that of his landlady.

Was the poor old Frenchman ill, or even dead? Her aunt had not alluded to him in her letter, however, and, surely, had any misfortune befallen

so valued a friend, she would never have omitted to mention the fact? . . .

As Lucy was debating thus, she became aware of a scratching sound proceeding from the library beyond. 'Is that you, Addie?' she called out.

'No; my dear, it's *me!*' answered the voice of her cousin Algy. 'I'm just writing a letter to our friend Hepburn.'

'There's another letter for him there,' remarked Lucy with assumed indifference, as she tripped down the flight of steps which separated the two rooms,—with the letter,—which would so soon reach the beloved's hand,—pressed close to her happy heart. 'It's got "to be forwarded" on it, and it's been sent on here, but now he won't get it so soon as if it had waited for him at home. Perhaps it could be sent on to him by the early post as it may be important?'

'It can go with mine,' replied Algy, who was just in the act of affixing his signature to the communication which has been already made public; 'for *that's* very important, too! If you'll kindly get me out a big envelope I'll enclose the two letters together.'

'Won't it save time if *I* direct the envelope?' she asked. It would be a secret pleasure,—she

thought,—to know that something from her would be spirited into the sacred presence through the agency of the penny-post, even if the recipient remained unconscious of the fact, through being unacquainted with her handwriting!

'All right!' returned her 'nearest living male relation,' condescendingly. 'And you can stick on the stamps, too,—whilst you're about it,—an extra penny and a halfpenny one, as well,—so as to be on the safe side,—for my letter's an awfully long one!'

CHAPTER VI.

About a week previous to the time of which I have been writing in the last chapter, 'Lord' Falconborough,—in his newly-assumed character of envoy, agent, and fashionable partner, paid his first visit to 'The Aspens,' at the request of his patron and employer. He did not present his card at the door, preferring to reserve the power of revealing himself,—in '*Alma-Viva*' fashion, later on,—should circumstances seem to indicate that such a course would be to his advantage. For the moment, therefore, he was merely 'a gentleman from Mr. Podmore,' who had called upon business,—and as such he was described to Mrs. Van Buren.

The somewhat showy and sensational style of this lady's personal attractions,—as perceived by him whilst she was taking her place in her Victoria,—had made a deep impression upon the mind of the young adventurer, and the extreme

care with which he had arrayed himself for his visit, proved that he regarded it with no common interest.

He was kept waiting for some time in a small apartment adjoining the drawing-room, which struck him as being very luxuriously furnished, and in which he perceived a faint aroma of tobacco. Here, he amused himself by contemplating his reflection in the chimney-glass,—examining the songs upon the pianoforte, and turning over the leaves of the photograph-books. By the time the lady of the house made her appearance, he had investigated almost every object in the room.

Mrs. Van Buren, although she was certainly a good deal heightened, tightened, whitened, and lightened,—by heels, 'over-pressure,' '*blanc de perles*,' and 'auricomous-fluid,' would have been what is commonly called 'a fine woman' without any of these meretricious aids. She was tall and well-made, in spite of a decided inclination to stoutness,—her features were regular,—of a somewhat aquiline and unfeminine type, and her eyes brilliant and expressive. She was fair and pale by nature,—although not quite so lily-like and golden-tressed as she had contrived to make her-

self. Her movements were imperious, and her voice loud and unsympathetic. One could see, at a glance, that she was a woman who had fared sumptuously, and lived luxuriously, and that anyone who might expect her to interest herself in the duties of a housewife, would probably be doomed to disappointment.

To some people, an honest and inoffensive ugliness is almost preferable to this sort of flaunting and sensational beauty, but there are others,—principally very young, or very old men, to whom it appears particularly to appeal. To Falconborough, although he belonged to neither of these two categories exactly,—the handsome grass-widow seemed to embody all that was most fascinating and attractive in woman,—and he looked at her with admiration in his dark eyes.

Mrs. Van Buren was engaged with her toilet when Mr. Podmore's emissary was announced, and her first thought had been to dismiss him imperiously. There were certain reforms and concessions, however, which she desired at the hands of her new landlord, and she had ended by passing on an elaborate garment composed of sky-blue satin and white lace, in which she had at last appeared before her visitor's dazzled gaze.

It was not very difficult for one of Falconborough's intelligence to perceive that Mrs. Van Buren was, at once, deeply impressed by his good looks. Evidently, he was not in the least the sort of person she had expected to see. She started perceptibly upon entering the room, and did not recover from her astonishment for some seconds.

'Mercy on us!' she exclaimed at length; 'my stupid servants have shown you into a room without a fire!'

She coughed a little nervously, and motioned him into the adjoining apartment, with a plump white hand, glittering with valuable rings. Here, it appeared to Falconborough,—who, notwithstanding his refined exterior and fastidious tastes, had known what it was during some of his past vicissitudes to be lodged in squalor,—that the same profusion and luxury were revealed upon every side. He was delighted with the warmth, the softness of the carpet, the cushioned divans, the perfume of many flowers, and with the trilling of a whole cage full of foreign singing-birds which stood near one of the windows, so as to catch the few rays of wintry sunshine.

Mrs. Van Buren was a patroness of what I shall call—for want of a better name—the 'Jungly'

style of upholstery, and she had introduced palm-trees and pampas-grass enough into her sitting-room to have served as a very respectable lair for a Bengal tiger. Under most of the palm-trees, and overshadowed by nodding grasses, were arranged low divans,—looking like idealized feather-beds, tricked out with soft pillows and Oriental embroideries,—some of which were shut off from the rest of the apartment by gilded screens overrun with artificial ivy. The stems of the palms were embellished with mirrors, photographs, and knick-knacks of almost every description, attached to them with bows of satin after the manner of the decorations upon a Christmas-tree, whilst a good deal of really clever manœuvring was required, on the part of the visitor, to steer clear of a whole pack of modern Dresden pugs which were standing and lying about upon the carpet. A portrait, representing the goddess of this luxurious shrine, dressed in fantastic costume, stood upon an easel, set up askew, in the midst of a grove of India-rubber plants, and overshadowed by a gigantic wine-glass filled with bulrushes and other specimens of aquatic vegetation, whilst by groping one's way cautiously, and 'treading delicately,' like Agag, through the palms, the pug-

dogs, the pampas-grasses and India-rubbers,—for the light which penetrated through the pink silk window-blinds was softened and subdued,—the visitor arived eventually at the fireplace, which, shrouded in velvet and point-lace, presented somewhat the appearance of an altar. Nor was there a single photograph-frame, mirror, or object in ormolu, that had not its own particular trappings of lace and coloured ribbons. What a contrast this drawing-room presented to the little parlour at Barlow Lodge, (only, of course, 'Lord' Falconborough, never having set foot there, could not appreciate this,) with its black paper profiles, blue ginger-pots, and prim eighteenth century calm! He could perceive, however, that its 'treatment' was utterly different from the 'first-class waiting-room style,' affected by Mr. Podmore at Palmyra House, and it struck him as being vastly superior to it in every way.

'What a delicious scene of enchantment!' he exclaimed, as he flung himself carelessly upon one of the idealized feather-beds, and gazed up at his companion through the overhanging palm-leaves.

Mrs. Van Buren looked a little taken aback at the extreme ease of his manner. Falconborough perceived this, and instantly rose from the divan.

'Forgive me!' he murmured, in his softest tones. 'I was forgetting that, without your permission, I have no more right to seat myself in your presence than the plumber and glazier, or the clock-winder! . . . Ten thousand pardons!' . . .

'I must say,' returned Mrs. Van Buren, smiling, 'that you don't *look* much like a plumber and glazier, or a clock-winder either, though the young man who winds up my clocks is quite a nice-looking young fellow I can assure you!'

'A nobleman in disguise, no doubt!' said Falconborough, glancing at her admiringly. 'One whose path you may have crossed, perhaps, for a moment, and who has conceived this method in order to obtain a renewal of the vision. Happy clock-winder!'

'You're talking great rubbish!' exclaimed Mrs. Van Buren looking down at her rings; 'and I can't make out, for the life of me, who in the world you are, or what you want with me!' She had, perhaps, taken the hint which he had intended to convey when he had spoken about a nobleman in disguise. At any rate, she spoke less angrily than coquettishly.

'You think, perhaps, that I am like the pretended clock-winder? Well, well, *on verra!* . . .

In the meantime, I am simply Mr. Podmore's representative, and we must converse entirely upon business!'

'Have you *really* anything to do with that dreadful Mr. Podmore?' the lady inquired,—looking at him with an expression as of growing interest.

'I am absolutely and entirely his instrument and creature!' returned Falconborough lightly; 'at any rate for the present. I am saturated and imbued with Podmore's interests and opinions to the very core of my being. . . . But why should we remain standing?' . . .

He sank down languidly upon the divan. This time, Mrs. Van Buren displayed no signs of surprise. The divan appeared to her to be his proper place.

Amongst the embroidered cushions lay a large wax doll, with a broken nose, and a guitar. Upon the back of the guitar was a female name, inlaid in ebony and mother-of-pearl.

'I have discovered three things about you in as many seconds,' said Falconborough, taking up the musical instrument as if with tender reverence. 'You are blessed with a daughter, you play upon the guitar, and your name is "Léonora."'

'I have one little girl,' returned Mrs. Van Buren, as she, also, seated herself upon the divan; 'she is a sweet, pretty child.' . . .

'"*Bella madre, bella figlia,*"' interrupted Falconborough with an admiring glance. 'Perhaps I may be permitted to behold this little angel some day? . . . When we have finished talking over Mr. Podmore's affairs,' he added archly.

'My tiresome nurse has stupidly been taken ill,' returned Mrs. Van Buren, 'and the child isn't fit to be seen this morning. I bring her up to despise anybody who isn't *bien mise*, and never allow her to appear in public unless she is properly dressed.'

'Quite right! an excellent early education for a pretty woman! . . . Cruel to *us*, however, since it renders her all the more irresistible! . . . One's servants,' he added,—with the manner of one who is master of a complete establishment of well-fed family retainers,—'are very apt to make themselves ill through over-eating.'

'They are; but this one is a black woman, from India, and we can't get the foolish creature to eat anything but rice,—just as the doctor says, she must be kept up in every possible way!'

'They are all equally provoking!' observed Falconborough, as with the weariness of an oppressed householder. 'But tell me;—is not your name "Léonora?"'

'Yes; but I am called "Léonie" by those who know me best.'

(She had been christened 'Eliza' at the font, but there was surely no need to inform anybody of this;—indeed, she had almost forgotten the fact herself!)

'Léonora is by far the more beautiful name of the two,' murmured Falconborough dreamily. 'It is warmer, more passionate, more Italian, and it suits you better, besides. If ever a poor plumber, glazier, clock-winder,—call me what you will!—were to venture to address you so familiarly,—he would call you by your own glorious name. . . . You are too young to remember Mario, but you may know one of his most lovely songs. I heard him sing it once,—long ago,—when I was quite a child.'

He struck a few chords upon the guitar, and sang, in a soft undertone, the first verse of the celebrated tenor song from the *Trovatore*, which, in spite of the ruthless manner in which it has been murdered by the amateur and the organ-

grinder, must remain beautiful to the end of time.

Mrs. Van Buren, who had, probably, accepted the 'nobleman-in-disguise' theory, in explanation of this unexpected visit, and who had seemed disposed,—after her first astonishment had subsided, —to abandon herself to the charms of the situation,—was now completely carried away from her moorings.

'Oh, how exquisitely you sing! . . . How beautifully you pronounce Italian! . . . Oh, do, please, go on!' . . . She exclaimed in a breath.

But, just at this moment an interruption occurred,—an interruption that occurred frequently at Barlow Lodge:—

'If you please, Mum,' said the boy in buttons appearing in the doorway, 'it's the Marq*uee.*'

'A tiresome old Frenchman who comes to teach my little girl,' Mrs. Van Buren explained, *sotto voce.* 'He'll have to come in here as there isn't a fire in the study. That provoking woman has put everything out by getting so ill!'

Falconborough dropped the guitar, and rose from his place on the divan. Another moment and Monsieur de la Vieilleroche entered the apartment.

'Good morning,' said the Marquis, bowing, with old-fashioned politeness, almost to the ground. 'There is no occasion to inquire if Madame is well. Her blooming appearance assures me of the fact!'

'A gentleman who has called to see me . . . upon business,' 'Madame' proceeded to explain, indicating Falconborough with a wave of her jewelled hand.

'Upon *musical* business, I presume?' said the Professor, bowing again. 'I am proud to become acquainted with one who is an artist to the very tips of his fingers.'

Mrs. Van Buren gave vent to a little contemptuous titter, as though to apologise to Falconborough for the old man's oddity of expression, The 'nobleman in disguise,' however, bowed politely in dignified appreciation of the compliment.

'I have been listening outside your door,' the Marquis went on, as he wiped and carefully assumed his *pince-nez*, 'whilst I was removing my paletôt, and I have been in a complete state of ravishment! . . . Your friend, Madame, is a real Orpheus,—he has made an impression upon a "*Vieille Roche.*" You may remember, perhaps,

that the young explorer of the Infernal Regions was in the habit of ravishing the rocks by his strains?'

But Mrs. Van Buren appeared to be too much overcome by a desire to giggle to be equal to a reply.

Having adjusted his *pince-nez* to his satisfaction, Monsieur de la Vieilleroche looked at the young man before him, for some seconds, with attention.

'Monsieur is Italian?' he asked, when he had completed his examination.

'Pardon me,' returned Falconborough, with an engaging smile, 'I am an Englishman.'

'Strange!' muttered de la Vieilleroche, with the manner of a person thinking aloud. . . . 'I could have declared it upon oath! . . . Englishmen with tenor voices of this particular calibre are extremely rare. . . . You are the first I have met with after a long residence in this country. . . . And now, my young friend, examine me well in your turn. My name is Achille de la Vieilleroche,—I am a Frenchman,—as you will have perceived,—and very proud to avow my nationality. Look at me well,—consider my features attentively,—and then tell me where it is that we have met before.'

'I cannot remember having ever had the pleasure of meeting you until to-day,' returned Falconborough, looking a little uncomfortable.

'Strange!' muttered de la Vieilleroche, again. 'As we grow old, what tricks the memory is inclined to play us! . . . It becomes overcharged, like a page of blotting-paper which has served us for too long! . . . When you were quite a little boy, so tall, only'—(he held his hand not more than a foot from the carpet)—'did I never give you lessons in the French language? . . . That would account to me, perhaps, for your eyes seeming to be so familiar.'

'Not that I am aware of,—unless it may have been, as Monsieur suggests, when I was very small indeed. I have no recollection of the fact myself.'

'And I never instructed you in the art of fence, or accompanied you upon your *grand tour*, or entertained you,—in my more prosperous days, in the hereditary *chateau* of the de la Vieilleroches, situated upon the borders of the Loire?'

'Not that I am aware of, Monsieur. It may have been when I was an infant in arms, but yet, one would hardly teach a baby to fence!'

'Then, Monsieur, it can only be that you bear a marked resemblance to some friend. With

time, I shall remember to whom. "*Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis.*" This may, surely, apply, sometimes, to those who are like our friends in feature! . . . Again permit me to felicitate you upon the possession of so beautiful a voice; and then,—to my delightful labours;—how is my dear little pupil and the faithful Rájama?'

'Oh, that tiresome woman doesn't seem to get any better! All last night she was moaning and groaning, and keeping everybody awake;—talking all kinds of nonsense about her body being eaten up by vultures! I fancy she must have been delirious, for the fever seems to get a good deal worse towards evening. Mr. Bury declares that it isn't catching, but I must say I'm beginning to feel awfully nervous,—I thought of running down to Brighton for a little blow of sea-air.'

'But you would take the child with you? You would not allow so precious a life to become endangered?'

The old Professor looked sternly at Mrs. Van Buren as he said this. It seemed to Falconborough that she quailed beneath his glance.

('That old fellow has got the "whip-hand" of her, somehow,' he said to himself.—'She is

in his power, and seems to be afraid of him: I must find out the reason!')

'I'm not at all sure that I shall be able to get Lily to go with me to Brighton,' replied Mrs. Van Buren almost apologetically; 'and I thought it would be bad for her to force her against her will. For so young a child, I can tell you, she's awfully obstinate,—it's as much as we can do, now, to get her out of her ayah's room, and she's been crying, so that she looks a perfect figure of fright. She's a child that takes the most absurd fancies to people!'

'The dear child has heart!' exclaimed the Marquis, striking his chest violently to the left of his crumpled shirt-frill. 'Her ayah has nursed her from a baby. What wonder is it that they should love one another?'

'Oh, I daresay it's all perfectly natural!' returned Mrs. Van Buren, still speaking in an aggrieved tone; 'but it's very provoking, all the same! . . . This was why I didn't think of taking Lily to Brighton, once the doctor assured me that the illness wasn't catching.—I must say, also, that change of air doesn't do one the same amount of good if one has a child with one, to fuss about; for, you see, now that her nurse is laid up, my

maid and I would have Lily entirely upon our hands.'

'Far better this, and the temporary inconvenience attending it, than that the little angel should suffer by remaining here!' returned the Marquis, speaking like one having authority. 'These fevers, which in themselves may not be infectious, proceed, often, from something unwholesome in the state of a house. The same cause that gives them to one person, will communicate itself to another. May I trust, therefore, that Madame and Miss Lily will go for a change to the seaside as soon as possible? May I write to friends who may be anxious to know, and inform them that this is the case?'

'I've been wondering a good deal about the state of the house,' said Mrs. Van Buren, without replying to this last question; 'and I've come to the conclusion that there's really something wrong with it. I've been meaning, for some time to write to Mr. Podmore about it, and I was just going to speak to this gentleman upon the subject.'

'Monsieur is a sanitary inspector?' asked the Professor, turning to Falconborough, and again examining him through his glasses. 'A sanitary

inspector with the voice of a Mario! He must be as uncommon as the Dodo!'

'I believe I'm here in some such capacity,' replied Falconborough, smiling his sweetest smile. 'Mr. Podmore commissioned me to put forward his views with regard to this lady's occupation of the premises, and should any repairs be needed, I will make a point of laying the matter before him.'

'Monsieur is accompanied by a builder?—an experienced working-man accustomed to these investigations?'

'No; but I will make it my business to secure the services of some such person to-morrow. At what hour, Madame, may I have the pleasure of waiting upon you again?'

He bowed low to Mrs. Van Buren as he spoke. The handsome grass-widow seemed embarrassed as to how to reply under the keen *pince-nez* of the old Frenchman. She looked down at her white hands and played with her rings, as though considering. The Marquis, however, came quickly to her rescue.

'Do not lose any time, I implore you, Monsieur!' he exclaimed, earnestly; 'the matter is of the utmost importance! Pray call here to-mor-

row, at your earliest convenience, accompanied by an experienced workman. I will look in during the afternoon in order to learn the result.'

Relieved, thus, of all responsibility, Mrs. Van Buren dismissed her fascinating visitor with an inclination, the formality of which she took care to exaggerate, so that he might perceive that it was merely assumed in consequence of the presence of a third person.

'His lordship' described his visit to Mr. Podmore something after the fashion in which History is occasionally written.

'Well, my dear Podmore! I called this morning upon the syren! but didn't get through quite as much business as I could have wished. Ladies are a little inclined to shirk such matters, and one has to approach them delicately. I arrived, too, it seems, at rather an unpropitious moment. The lady was dressing, and kept me waiting for nearly an hour. Then, the fire was out, and a nigger-servant down with the measles, or something of the kind, (they're not sure, yet, whether it's catching or not,) and the brat was squalling, with nobody to look after it or put on its clothes; and then, just as we were beginning to talk things over, in came a bothering old

Frenchman to give the child its lesson. He took me for a sanitary inspector, for it seems they've a screw loose somewhere in the house, which they want you to set to rights, and I was very nearly being taken downstairs to examine the dust-bin and the grease-trap. However, I've made an appointment to call again to-morrow,' he added, airily, 'when, I've no doubt, I shall be able to make up for lost time!'

'My dear fellow!' cried Mr. Podmore, effusively, 'how can I ever sufficiently thank you? You shock me, however, greatly, by what you tell me. How was it that you did not send in your card at the door, or have yourself properly announced? You would then have been treated with proper civility.'

'I can't say that I was treated *uncivilly*, exactly,' returned Falconborough, as though making the best of what might have been a little unpleasant. 'Mrs. Van Buren received me as a lady generally receives a stranger calling upon business, and this was precisely what I wanted. Who knows, supposing that I had given my name, whether she might not have considered it necessary to gossip about the opera, or the latest scandal? in which case, my dear

fellow, your affairs would have had to go to the wall!'

Mr. Podmore threw quite a romantic expression of gratitude into his round green eyes, and congratulated himself more than ever upon his talent for discovering intrinsic worth.

But there was one circumstance connected with his visit to 'The Aspens' which Falconborough determined to keep to himself, and which had considerably heightened the interest he already felt in the lady of the house.

Whilst awaiting the coming of Mrs. Van Buren, with no sort of malicious intention, be it understood, but simply for his own amusement, he had examined the contents of a large photographic album which was lying upon the table. Most of the portraits were those of persons totally unknown to him; Anglo-Indians, as far as he was able to judge by their cool costumes and palmy backgrounds; and there were also a good many representations of buildings, distant views of cities, bristling with minarets, and of Bhudhist tombs and rock-temples.

Three separate groups of figures, however, taken upon a somewhat larger scale than the others, particularly arrested his attention.

The first of these, as it was a good deal faded, had probably been taken some years ago. It represented Mrs. Van Buren, in elegant summery attire, and considerably slimmer in figure than she was at present, seated in what was evidently the verandah of an Indian bungalow. On one side of her sat a common-looking person in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a long pipe, and on the other, a handsome young man of military appearance, and wearing a very becoming '*Sombrero*,' was leaning back in a bamboo rocking-chair, with his right arm in a sling.

In the second group, Mrs. Van Buren, dressed in a light, but very tight-fitting riding-habit, was depicted mounted upon horseback, whilst the same handsome young man, in undress uniform, and wearing his forage-cap very much on one side, was stooping down in the act of adjusting her stirrup-leather. In the background the common-looking person could be discovered, standing some way off, with his hands in his pockets.

The third group, which seemed to be of a somewhat later date, represented Mrs. Van Buren seated, smiling; the common-looking person, seated, smiling likewise—rather sardonically,—and a native 'ayah,' dressed in loose white garments,

carrying a baby. The handsome young officer, looking a little older than in the two first portraits, was standing holding a white parasol over the ayah and the baby, wearing rather a serious expression, as if of responsibility and solicitude.

Falconborough, whose memory for faces was remarkable, immediately recognised the handsome young man who lounged in the bamboo rocking-chair, adjusted the stirrup-leather, and shaded the baby.

It was Anthony Hepburn; the man with whom he had insisted upon claiming cousinship, and upon whom he had sworn that he would one day be revenged.

CHAPTER VII.

The first week in December brought Lady Mabella Binks's visit to Belmorris Castle to a close. She had already stayed there much longer than she had originally intended, having been pressed to remain on by her brother, first upon one pretext and then upon another.

Lady Mabella always liked to stay long enough at a country-house to recoup herself for the expenses of the journey, but this end having now been more than achieved, and her snug little house in Wilton Place made ready for her reception, she was desirous of settling herself in town before Christmas,—a season which she had never consented to pass at Belmorris since the decease of the late Mr. Binks, who had won her affections whilst he was officiating there as private chaplain. The very day, therefore, after Lucy's eventful afternoon at Falconborough Park, the Binks family set about preparing for their departure,

and Guffy, wearing even a more agonised expression than usual, commenced the arduous business of packing up their effects.

Lucy, too, had deposited the first and second *strata*, consisting of books, boots, work-boxes, and other solid matter, at the bottom of her modest trunk; but Lord Belmorris had begged—as a favour—that she would leave out her riding-habit to the very last, so that he might take her for at least one more ride, promising that, this time, he would be careful to mount her upon a more reliable steed. The last day of her stay at the castle dawned at length, and, early in the afternoon, she started off, with her host, for her last ride.

Lord Belmorris, who had been more than usually silent and pre-occupied of late, scarcely opened his lips until they had passed outside the boundaries of the park. He took his way towards the scene of their previous misadventure, and when within sight of the little Crusoe-hut upon the edge of the ploughed field, he pulled up his horse, and pointed it out to Lucy, saying, with a sigh,—

'Look! there's the little crib where I was once so happy! It turns one quite heart-sick to

look at it now! If it was mine, I think I should have to pull it down!'

He spoke bitterly, and Lucy noticed that he looked haggard and unhappy. Some notion of what might be the cause of his changed aspect, flashed upon her as though by intuition. She was becoming more learned every day in the mysteries of the heart! . . . .

She looked in his face inquiringly. Pity and remorse mingled in her glance. Was it possible that—because he had been so very, very kind to her, and because she had been anxious to show him that she was not altogether ungrateful—she might, inadvertently, have given him some sort of encouragement?

Their eyes met. He had always been clever at reading her thoughts.

'You see how it is!' he said sadly; 'and there's no help for it now, I suppose, so it's not for me to worry you about what I may have to bear; but I should like, if I may, to talk to you a little about yourself!'

'I can't bear to think that you're unhappy,' faltered Lucy, tears starting to her eyes. 'Oh, I hope that it hasn't been all my fault!'

'It's nobody's fault but my own. If it hadn't

been for my abominable vanity and stupidity, I must have seen just how things would have ended; but, somehow, I never quite realised the extent of my folly until the day before yesterday! I suppose,' he added, after a short pause, 'that you're very fond of him?' He pointed, as he spoke, to the dark line made by the Falconborough woods upon the horizon immediately to their left.

'Do you care about him very much?'

'I think I do,' she answered softly; 'as much as I can ever care for anybody in the world!'

'Well then, look here, my child! Far be it from me to upset your illusions. Mistrust crops up quite soon enough in this world, and once it's there, it's apt to haunt one like one's shadow. But I shouldn't be right, considering everything, if I didn't give you a word or two of advice. You won't set it all down to envy, hatred, and malice on my part, if I speak to you quite openly —as a friend? You see I can't, now, ever hope to be anything more!'

'I will listen to anything you have to say,' returned Lucy, feeling some misgivings, nevertheless. She hoped he was not going to tell her anything to Anthony's disadvantage, for, even

although she might not be influenced in the least by his words, they would be very painful to listen to!

'Well then, look here, my dear little Lucy, for I think we know each other well enough for me to call you by your name, have you anything certain to go by in the future? Hepburn may care for you, I dare say, for everybody who knows you must grow to love you, and I daresay he has managed to let you know this—I don't ask you *how*, or *where*, for I think I would far rather not know; but I feel bound to put one question to you as you've been, as it were, under my charge:—Has he ever asked you to become his wife?'

Remembering, as she did, Anthony's last words to her, Lucy felt that she was bound to silence.

'I—I—can't answer you that,' she stammered, 'I dare not say; I think—I hope—that he will ask me some day!'

'Ah!' murmured Lord Belmorris, drawing a long breath, whilst his dark eyes flashed for a moment; 'I feared as much. It isn't quite fair—upon my soul it isn't! I don't want to say a word against Hepburn; I believe he's a good

fellow at heart, and doesn't know the harm he may be doing, and if there wasn't any danger of his making *you* suffer, he's quite welcome to amuse himself as much as he likes; but it isn't quite fair of him to fix upon anyone like you to play with! He's placed in a very awkward position, and has no right to be making love to young ladies at all. Anthony Hepburn isn't a marrying man.'

Again these ambiguous words which she had heard so often reiterated. How she longed, now, to contradict them!

'He *is* a marrying man!' she would have exclaimed, but for his express desire. 'He has called me his own "Lucy." Some day I am to be his wife!'

As matters stood, however, she had to listen in silence.

'This being the case,' Lord Belmorris went on, 'and caring for you as you must have seen that I *did* care, perhaps I behaved like a fool in asking Hepburn over to stay. But I'm one of those fellows that would rather know the worst at once, than go dragging on in uncertainty, and I wanted to see, before I said anything to you myself, whether you had any room for me in

your heart. Hepburn was the only fellow I was afraid of, for I thought you cared about him as long ago as when we were down at Hampton Court, and when I saw him wearing the "button-hole" I'd given you the night before. He might have *taken* it, (I said to myself,) against your will, but as soon as I saw you and him together, here, I knew it was all up with my hopes. I'm afraid, however, that he can't marry you.'

'Is he married already?' she asked, feeling a death-chill at her heart, but desiring, like Lord Belmorris, to 'know the worst at once.'

('I am not married, I swear it!' he had said to her as they stood together under his mother's picture, but what if he had deceived her? . . . . Alas, 'mistrust,' as Lord Belmorris had just remarked, 'crops up' soon enough in all conscience!)

'He's not *married*, I believe,' her companion returned, with some show of hesitation; 'but,—and this I should never have spoken to you about, except for circumstances,—he got into a scrape about ten years ago in India, and since then he can hardly be looked upon as quite a free man.'

'Did he do anything *really wrong?*' Lucy inuired, turning very pale.

'He didn't do anything particularly *wise*, but he did no worse than a good many of his neighbours, and nothing whatever to lower himself in the opinion of his friends; for, you see, we men are the lords of creation, and we make moral codes to suit ourselves! He was very young at the time, and all the women ran after him and made much of him, for he's the sort of manly, good-looking fellow, that women like; I've no doubt there was hardly a man in his regiment who wouldn't have acted precisely in the same way, if he'd found himself placed in the same circumstances.'

'But what did he do?' asked Lucy, breathlessly; 'tell me all, now that you have told me so much!'

She reined in her horse, and looked into her companion's face imploringly. He was unable to resist her appeal.

'It's better you *should* know, perhaps,' he said after a pause; 'for you're nearly certain to be told about it some day. A good-looking woman nursed him after he'd met with an accident, and took a fancy to him, and, afterwards, fled to him for protection from a brute of a husband, and there was a row.'

'And did *he* care for her? . . Was *he* in love with her too? . .'

She was looking at Lord Belmorris with haggard eyes, and clinging with one hand to the pummel as if in fear of falling.

'I can't pretend to say what his private feelings may have been, but I was in India at the time, and so heard what was generally reported. The fancy was supposed to be chiefly upon the side of the lady, who was said to have taken fancies of the same kind before. I suppose, however, that having been the means of getting her into trouble, he thought that he ought to stick to her and make the best of it.'

'But he didn't marry her; you're *sure* that he isn't married, and all this happened ten years ago? . . . .'

'Quite ten years ago, I should think. Hepburn couldn't have been more than two or three and twenty at the time, and he couldn't have married the lady even if he had wished it. The husband had behaved too badly himself to be able to "come down" upon his wife; for there's a law by which a man can't get rid of a woman if there are faults on both sides. These are matters that you'll understand better as you grow older.'

'And he didn't care for her very much? . . . . You said that they thought, in India, that he didn't really care? . . . .'

'That was the general impression, I believe, amongst his friends, and a good deal of pity was felt for him; for anything of this kind taking place when a fellow's quite young, is apt to hamper him in after-life. I dare say, too, that, well off though he is, it may have made a hole in his pocket.'

'He isn't married, and he didn't care for her, and it all happened quite ten years ago!' repeated Lucy, as if talking to herself. 'Ah, then, it was really nothing after all!'

She looked eagerly in Lord Belmorris's face, for a confirmation of her words. The colour had returned to her cheeks. It was as though some terrible danger which she had dreaded was overpassed.

'It wasn't exactly "nothing,"' returned Lord Belmorris, gravely; 'but it's all very difficult to explain to a child like you. You'll he able to make out all about it by-and-by, and I hope you won't think any the worse of me for what I've told you; I've been trying to act as a friend.'

'I shall always feel grateful to you for your

kindness; but, now, please tell me one other thing. Why, if this all happened so long ago, and if Colonel Hepburn didn't marry her, and didn't care, mightn't he be free now to do as he likes? . . . After so long—mightn't he nearly have forgotten her? . . . I fancied that men could forget so easily! Or, do they only forget when they ought to remember, and remember when it would be better for them to forget? . . . . Why mightn't he be quite free now? . . . .'

'I concluded, of course, that he *was* free. I had too good an opinion of him to suppose that, otherwise, he would have acted as he has done. The day before yesterday, at Falconborough, when he walked you off, before everybody, into the picture-gallery, you must have seen that I was rather put out. I was very nearly going after you, but I said to myself, "He's got quit of his millstone, and he's going to propose." If he had done so you would have heard nothing of all this, from *me*, at any rate. He did *not* do so, however,—you are unable to satisfy me upon this point. He's made you care for him, he knows that you're going away to-morrow. He has had plenty of opportunities, and he's given you no sort of assur-

ance that he had any serious intentions. The fact speaks for itself!'

They had turned out of the highroad, and were taking their way abstractedly, at a foot's pace, over a piece of waste land covered with dead heather and seedling firs. Ahead of them, lay a plantation through which they could return home by a circuitous route.

Lucy had been deeply moved by all she had heard. But revelations of this nature are sometimes the means of discovering to a woman the real depth and intensity of her affection; and, notwithstanding the painful emotions which were agitating her bosom, she felt that there was no diminution whatsoever in her love.

The Indian episode, seeing that it had happened so long ago, that Anthony had called no other woman by the sacred name of 'wife,' and that he could say—after it was over and done with—to his 'own Lucy:'—'I love no one but you,' she did not attach very much importance to—being still in that first state of innocency when the subtler mysteries of existence are wholly unrevealed; and she wondered that Lord Belmorris—who did not seem to take an exaggerated view of matters in general—should have

appeared so disposed to overrate its consequences.

They rode on in silence, Lord Belmorris looking grave and pre-occupied, until they reached the avenue leading from the chief entrance to the Castle. Then, turning to Lucy, he said earnestly:—

'I hope to Heaven that things will go well with you, my child, and that you'll be happy and prosperous in the future. But, should they go wrong, and should you ever stand in need of a friend, don't forget to write to a crusty old bachelor up in the north who loves you very much, and who'd lay down his life to serve you. Promise me this!'

He held out his hand in token of his good faith. Lucy yielded him hers.

'I promise,' she said, as they clasped hands; and she smiled gratefully at him, though there were tears in her eyes.

'Good-bye; and God bless you!' he said sadly.

'Oh, look!' she cried suddenly; 'there's the new moon! We ought to wish!' . . . .

It was foolish, of course, to attach any importance to such wishes, but the appearance of the

new moon just at this moment, in the amber evening sky, seemed like an auspicious omen. It was such a lovely new-born moon, too,—set straight up over their two heads—

'No bigger than an eye-lash or a "C"'

between the dark lines made by the trees of the avenue.

The sworn friends looked up at it together with hands still clasped.

'It isn't much good my wishing anything again by moons,' said Lord Belmorris at length, with a sigh; 'but you can wish something nice for yourself, and then I'll wish that you may get it! . . . What a blank there'll be, at home, when I look at that same moon to-morrow night!'

CHAPTER VIII.

On the morning of this day upon which Lucy and her host had sallied forth for their last ride together,—for that year, at any rate,—within the shadowy line of park-woods which was visible upon the western horizon, the master of Falconborough Park was sitting at home in his study,—the room wherein he had been confronted, once, with the man who pretended to lay claim to his uncle's title and estates. Colonel Hepburn, and his guest Captain Sparshott, had been out for a long ride before breakfast, and were now taking their ease, each after his own fashion. Anthony was seated at his writing-table, dashing off, in a desultory manner, the arrears of his correspondence; whilst Captain Sparshott lounged in an easy-chair by the fireplace, smoking a cigarette, and reading the *Sporting Times*. Later on they had arranged to shoot a little in the near coverts.

Charlie Sparshott, as he was called by nearly

everybody, was a smart-looking young man of extremely military appearance. His features were delicate and slightly aquiline, his hair cut as short as a convict's, and his complexion like that of a 'Professional Beauty.' His head was somewhat high and narrow, betokening perhaps, a little too much caution and self-esteem, with the ears set on rather high up, an evidence (as I have heard), of keen powers of ordinary observation, as opposed to the perception of artistic combinations. He was below, rather than above the middle height, slim and well built, as became a noted rider and dancer, and would have been described as *dark*, rather than fair, although with a degree of darkness which was essentially English.

In 'the 18th' he was excessively popular, affording amusement to his brother-officers by his display of the quaint mixture of caution and candour of which his nature seemed to be composed. He was one of the few people in existence who, apparently, said precisely what he thought upon nearly every subject, and his personal hopes and misgivings became at once the property of the regiment. For his Colonel he entertained sentiments of affection and respect, which trod, as it were, upon the heels of worship, regarding him

as the noblest, the cleverest, the most chivalrous of men. Colonel Hepburn had been touched by his artless devotion. Charlie Sparshott had joined the regiment soon after he had entered it himself —for there was a difference of a few years only, in their respective ages. They had served together in India and Afghanistan, and making allowance for certain contrasts which existed in their dispositions, the two men had ended by becoming firm friends.

Colonel Hepburn looked, upon this particular morning, a good deal brighter and happier than was his wont, for the expression of his face, when in repose, was usually rather serious, and at times almost careworn. To-day, however, he seemed to have flung aside this marble sternness; and, as is often the case with those who but rarely unbend, his gaiety and geniality were fraught with a peculiar charm.

The ingenuous prattle of his friend, Sparshott, prevented him from making much way with his letters, but he was not engaged upon anything of importance, and so was quite willing to listen to the Captain's remarks, interspersed, from time to time, with extracts from the sayings and doings of 'Gubbins,' 'Ole Brer Rabbit,' or 'the Pote.'

'I say, Colonel!' exclaimed Captain Sparshott, by-and-by, speaking with more than usual animation. 'Look here! . . . . I want to ask you a question, because you're clever, and all that, which *I*'m not! . . . . If you were a fellow whose "governor" was always bothering you to marry and settle, which would you rather choose, —a girl, or a widow?'

'Well, of course, if I had been previously attached to a widow,' returned Colonel Hepburn, smiling; 'I should probably wish to marry the woman I liked best. But I think if I was "heart-whole and fancy-free," I'd rather choose some nice girl, and start fair!'

'The worst of it is,' said the Captain, with a look of mingled astuteness and perplexity, 'you can't tell a bit how a girl's going to turn out! . . . . You see a nice cheery girl, don't you know, with plenty of "go" in her, and looking as fresh as paint, and all that; but it's just like seeing a horse in the stables with all his clothes on; one wants to take him a turn in the paddock, for I'm not a fellow that likes taking a leap in the dark!'

'Ah, you were always prudent, Charlie! . . . But you mustn't overdo it! . . . . "Nothing venture, nothing have," you know!'

'Yes; I think of that; and that it doesn't do to let a good thing slip; but I must say, I'm awfully nervous about girls! . . . They *do* seem, now-a-days, to be so uncommonly knowing! and I never "went in" much for other men's wives, even in India,—being a fellow that's bound to marry sooner or later, and not wanting to get into a row, or run my head into a halter; and I think, if I marry at all, I should like it to be *soon*, because, then, the old man would be alive to see it, and it would please him. . . . But I've just remembered that there were such things as widows.'

'You weren't thinking, then, of any one widow in particular?'

'No; I just saw something in the "Pink 'Un" about "a neat little short-legged widow," and that put widows into my head. I'd quite forgotten about them; and I was wondering if one mightn't be less disappointed with a widow than with a girl, because one wouldn't expect her to be a "guileless young creature," or anything of that sort; and one might get to know the worst of her first. But these girls *do* seem, sometimes, to be so awfully cunning!'

'It would just depend upon what sort of girl

you chose to set your affections upon,' observed Colonel Hepburn. 'Some of them seem to be right enough!'

'Well, I was thinking of setting mine—in a kind of a way—(mind you, nothing to break one's heart over!), upon that Binks-girl. She does seem such a cheery, easy-going, jolly kind of a girl, and comes down to breakfast looking so sleek and well groomed! . . . But there are two things I don't, somehow, feel quite sure about, —her temper and her complexion! She's got a wildish look in her eye, sometimes, that makes me think she might turn nasty when roused, and I fancied the other day, when she was here, and when we were listening to the echo, that that nice pink colour she has was "*raddle*." It looked almost too good to be true!'

'Really, my dear Charlie, you'll have to take *some* things upon trust!' remarked Colonel Hepburn, amused at his *naïveté*.

'These are the two things I don't feel quite sure of,' Captain Sparshott continued; 'but there are others about her, I must say, that "fetch" me uncommonly! She's no notion, whatever, that I'm the least in a good position, fancying that poor Tim (my elder brother, don't you know,

that was drowned) is still alive (I found this out from something she said to me in this very room); in which case, as you may suppose, I should have been just as poor as a church mouse, and not worth a rush in the market! . . . Well; this doesn't seem to make the least difference to her, and, say what you like, it's always nice when a fellow can feel sure that he's cared about for himself!' and the Captain caressed his pointed moustaches as with an agreeable sense of gratified vanity.

'I fancy that the disinterested affection of a woman (of course I am speaking only of a woman who is able to please), is what tells most with us in the long run,' said Colonel Hepburn, turning round his chair from the writing-table, and confronting his guest. 'A man may not always value it when he discovers it first; but should he, in the flush of youth and prosperity, put it from him as a thing of little account, I believe in a sort of "Nemesis" which will cause him, at some time, to feel the want of it—

> "For Beauty is easy enough to win,
> But one isn't loved every day,"

as "Owen Meredith" says!'

'You're quite right!' returned the Captain

warmly; 'as, I must say, I think you nearly always *are!* And now this is just what takes me so much with that Binks-girl, though I'm not in love, or anything of that sort, and would a thousand times rather go on a little longer without speaking, than run the least risk of being imposed upon, for you know that I'm not the kind of fellow to be taken in! The first day I was over at Belmorris, I must say I took a tremendous fancy to that other girl,—the cousin,—Miss Lucy.' (Colonel Hepburn started rather uncomfortably, and wheeled his chair round again to the table.) 'She's quite as good-looking,—if not *better*,—and a deal more certain, I should say, with regard to temper; but she hasn't quite as much "go" about her, and I didn't find her nearly so easy to get on with; besides which, I saw, directly, that she'd paired off with the little Earl, and I'm not the sort of fellow to interfere with any other fellow's game, or spoil a young woman's chances in life, as you know!'

'What made you think that Miss Barlow had "paired off" with Belmorris?' asked Colonel Hepburn with assumed indifference. 'I can't say that I noticed anything of the kind myself.'

'If you'd been a marrying man, like me, and

thinking about the girls, you'd have noticed it directly. I never saw a man so spoony in the whole course of my life! How he *did* suffer from "the green-eyed monster," too, when you took her back to look at the pictures! Rather a bore for young Binks, I should say, who seems to behave as if the whole place was going to belong to him! However, he's an awful young ass, and wants licking into shape very badly. Ah, here come the letters!'

Anthony Hepburn was not sorry for this interruption. The conversation had taken what was to him anything but an agreeable turn. Captain Sparshott became very soon absorbed in his letters, and Anthony commenced, likewise, opening and reading his own.

Amongst them was a well-filled envelope from Belmorris Castle, directed in an unknown, but very sympathetic, female hand. Not Adeliza Binks's, for with that he had become acquainted during his stay at Belmorris. An expression of tenderness came into his eyes as they lighted upon it. What if it were a letter from his 'own Lucy?'

His brow clouded for a moment, when, upon opening it, he discovered that it was from Alger-

non Binks, and darkened still more at sight of the other letter which was enclosed.

This he turned over and examined several times, as though impatient, and yet fearful, of knowing its contents.

Finally, he set it upon one side, and read Algernon's letter through first.

'As you very truly observed, my dear Charlie, that young Binks is an "awful young ass!"' he remarked when he had come to the end of it.

'Wants licking into shape very badly!' repeated the Captain. 'Remember me to him, if you're writing, and tell him that I'm the man that could do it!'

Without acting precisely upon this suggestion, Colonel Hepburn took up a pen and wrote off his answer then and there, as if it gave him some sort of satisfaction to dispose of Algy's impertinences at once. His letter ran as follows:—

'My dear Binks,—

'I have to acknowledge your letter of yesterday's date, and to thank you for the interest you apparently take in my private affairs. When contemplating any step as serious as marriage, a man generally endeavours, first of all, to

please himself, and when in need of any additional guidance, seeks it from those whose wisdom and experience will ensure its being of some sort of value.

'With Sparshott's kindest regards,

'Believe me to be, my dear Binks,

'Yours very sincerely,

'ANTHONY HEPBURN.'

('I'm afraid,' said Algy to his sister, when he had received and read through this letter, upon the morning of his departure for London; 'that it doesn't look much as if he "meant business," after all!')

CHAPTER IX.

After dashing off his answer to Algernon Binks, Colonel Hepburn turned again to the missive with the black edge. He felt that he would rather read this letter where there would be no chance of his being interrupted by the witticisms of the *Sporting Times*, so, although Captain Sparshott seemed to have settled down quietly to his own correspondence, he rose from his place at the writing-table, and went into the library, in order that he might be alone.

An expression of pain passed over his face as he tore open the envelope. It was as though a flood of unwelcome recollections, buried for a while, and even, perhaps, well-nigh forgotten, were crowding upon him with overwhelming force. He glanced towards the ending, after he had looked at its opening lines, turned pale, and then, flinging himself into an armchair, read through the whole attentively.

As he proceeded, the care-worn look returned to his face, and, by the time he had finished, he appeared to have grown almost ten years older.

These were the words which seemed suddenly to have thrust him back into the realms of Doubt, Deception, and Despondency :—

'You will have been well aware, before receiving this, of the terrible effect your cruel, unfeeling letter of the other day must have produced upon me. Whilst reading it, I really and truly could scarcely believe my own senses, and I was so upset by it, that I have been seriously ill ever since, with a return of those awful palpitations which you used to pretend, once, made you so dreadfully anxious, and which the doctor declares are nothing but the result of a most violent shock to my system. The coldness and neglect with which I have been treated during the last five years, ought to have prepared me, perhaps, for the blow you have just dealt me; but it was difficult for me to believe that, after all the sacrifices I had made for you,—apart from having once actually saved your life,—I should be so ungratefully repaid.

'My affection helped me to make excuses for

your almost constant absence,—your regiment, your country visits, the extra business connected with your estate,—I said to myself that these were the causes which prevented us from meeting more often, and I went on hoping, as it now turns out, against all hope, until I received your last letter. I can scarcely bring myself to write about the insulting proposal it contains, without feelings of the deepest indignation. No doubt, the annuity that you propose settling upon me, in order, it is quite evident, to pension me off, and get rid of me for ever, may seem to you to be a very magnificent sum; and if I had been some low bar-maid, or actress, whom you had ruined and then grown tired of, it might have served, perhaps, as some sort of consolation; for, in such circles, female confidingness is treated with more charity, and one might still hope to settle down comfortably with a respectable person in one's own class. But what is to compensate a born lady, and one in the very best society,—as *I* was when I most unfortunately met you first,—for the loss of everything that makes existence enjoyable?

'I can assure you that, when I think of the Governor's Ball, at which you paid me so much

attention, and were so loud in your admiration of my wreath of real alive fire-flies,—of the Governor's wife coming to call upon me, and almost going down on her knees to beg me to sing at her concert, —and of the Charity Bazaar, at which I held a stall, and sold my own photographs for as much as ten rupees a piece,—I feel the blood positively boiling and hissing within my veins! And then to think of these miserable Cockneys and wretched retired shopkeepers actually refusing to visit me, and treating me as if I was dirt beneath their feet! Now, what can these odiously vulgar middle-class people possibly know against *me?* Nothing whatever! I have been living quietly and respectably enough, goodness knows, with nothing pleasant to relieve the mortal dulness! But they have found out, somehow, that I was separated from my husband, that I was living here alone, with no gentleman to look after my interests, except that ridiculous, half-crazy old Frenchman, who seems to have been placed over me by you, as a sort of detective, to pry into all my actions, so that, although I am perfectly lonely and neglected, I cannot look upon myself as enjoying the privilege of independence, and I am not able, in any way, to follow out my own

plans. In fact, if I had been anybody's kept mistress,—sprung out of the most obscure of gutters, —I could not be treated by everybody with more want of consideration. Even our dear little Lily, whom you used to say you would make a point of watching over and protecting as long as you lived, is subjected to insults which the child is sure to observe and question me about when she gets older.

'Only the other day, for instance, I had sent her out for a run on the Common, and was watching her from the window, as she came back over the road,—as Ràjama is still laid up in bed and utterly useless,—when her hoop ran up against our new landlord, who happened to be passing, a vulgar City fellow, a stockbroker, or something of the kind, who pays me no sort of attention, and has about as much knowledge of manners as a she-bear. This snob, instead of giving the child her hoop back again, as any real gentleman would have done, pushed it rudely away from him, and then positively turned and ran, just as some of the elephants used to do at sight of a pig, only because he happened to know that she was *my* child! What you say in your letter about "defraying the expenses" of her educa-

tion,—constituting yourself "legally" her guardian, and settling "an ample fortune upon her when she comes of age,"—is all very fine, and very generous, no doubt, and I will not stand in the way of your doing what is, after all, only your *bound duty*. But, a circumstance has lately happened which will enable you to do even more than this. Yes, Anthony, just as your cruel and unfeeling letter had cast me into the utmost depths of despair, *another*, which reached me by the Indian mail, proved to me that Providence had not yet quite deserted me, and made me feel that you will now be enabled to make the only reparation which is in your power to the woman who has endured so much pain and humiliation for your sake! That brute, whose violence and unkindness were the means of causing me to become so easily your prey, is now no more! A sunstroke, it seems, carried him off, quite suddenly, although he had left his bungalow apparently in his usual health, though after a rather heavy luncheon. Some of the details are really distressing, but it would be hypocritical of me to repine, and I can only feel truly thankful that I am free, and spared to enjoy what will be, I trust, a brighter and happier future for us both.

You may, possibly, have forgotten the promise which you gave me, in writing, a short time before the death of your mother, when the divorce proceedings against me had entirely collapsed, but when *I*, in my turn, might have brought forward the counter charges, and obtained my perfect freedom, had you not dissuaded me, for fear of the scandal; and purchased my silence, as it were, with this signed paper, to the effect that, if I became a widow within the period of ten years, you would make me proper reparation for the wrong I had suffered at your hands, and that you bound yourself not to contract a marriage with anybody else until that time had elapsed. I am a widow, now, Anthony, and for the sake of my child, I must hold you to your promise.

'Please remember, that there has been no sort of scandal in England, and that the accusations made against me in India had to be almost immediately abandoned. I consider, therefore, that my character is as good as that of any of my neighbours; and if there was ever any damage done to it, it was done by *you*. No one knew of this, however, but a few of your own brother-officers, and one or two other people who happened to be out there at the time, and several of

whom have since died. You will, therefore, be only marrying a lady who has had a husband before, and one daughter by her first marriage, which is a thing that occurs almost every day, and could do no harm whatever to your reputation, of which you seem suddenly to have become so uncommonly careful! I shall go into decent mourning at once, as anyone else in my position would do, and put Lily into black frocks; and I suppose (though this seems a perfect farce!) that we ought to do the correct thing, and wait for a year before we are married; but during this time I do not mean to keep it a secret that I am engaged, for I feel convinced that, although you seem lately to have forgotten all your obligations to me, the remembrance of my past devotion and self-sacrifice will occur to you now, and will prevent you from endeavouring to escape from what you must recognise as the path of Duty and Honour. Lily sends her love and many kisses to "dear god-papa," and this little elephant, which she has just drawn for you by laying down one of her Noah's Ark animals, and tracing all round it. The dear child's talent for drawing is quite extraordinary! . . . I wonder very often whether her picture is still where you

told me you hung it—by the side of your bed, where you could see it the first and the last thing? and whether the threepenny-piece which she gave you on the day she was three years old is still hanging upon your watch-chain, with your mother's wedding-ring, where you said you would always wear it? . . . I will not, however, recall to your mind things you may long ago have forgotten, but will conclude with my best love—although you will probably spurn it—and remain, still, yours, as devotedly as ever,

LÉONIE.

'P.S.—As I have had, so very unexpectedly, to go into deep mourning, and to put all the servants in too—and *crape* is so very expensive—you might, perhaps, write this quarter's cheque for rather a large amount.'

After reading this letter to the end, Anthony Hepburn threw himself back in his chair, and covered his face with his hands, like one who is stunned by a sudden blow. Old memories had been awakened—*bitter* memories to him—and, for awhile, they held him completely in thrall.

He was in India once more, and assisting, in

fancy, at the grand ball which had been given, more than ten years ago, by the Governor of Bombay. He could hear the strains of the music, smell the perfume of the flowers, and see the native princes in their gorgeous costumes, the verandah, lit up with its coloured lamps, and himself, as he was then—a careless English lad —with no presentiment of any coming event which might darken and embitter the best years of his life.

Then, in all the glories of a fresh Parisian *toilette*, there had loomed upon his sight the golden-haired, showy-looking wife of the 'Judge *Sahib*,' in her wreath of living fire-flies. In this radiant vision he had recognised a former acquaintance—the woman who, passing by chance, with her husband, at the hour of his need, had nursed and tended him after a serious accident, which had befallen him some six months previously whilst he was upon a hunting expedition in Cashmere. Gratitude at the recollection of her past kindness, a boy's artless admiration for her somewhat sensational charms, had induced him to ask her for the pleasure of the next valse. . . .

How thick and fast events seemed to have

followed one another after that first dance, and how suddenly and unexpectedly he had found himself, as it were, involved in a web of toils! Ah, this had all happened more than ten years ago! But surely at very nearly three-and-twenty he ought to have known better! Boys remain boys, however, much longer than girls remain girls, and the after-wisdom of both boy and girl is often somewhat dearly purchased.

He had changed—in mind, in spirits, in heart—since that well-remembered evening, and yet the consequences of his boyish infatuation were haunting him still, and seeming to stand like spectres between himself and the daylight! Perhaps it was quite right and proper that rash and lawless deeds should bring in their train a whole horde of loosened demons to torture and torment, but punishments which are administered in the name of Justice are none the less painful upon that account, and for the first few moments his destiny seemed to him to be almost too hard to endure.

One of the unpleasantest things about this letter was its truth. To almost every charge brought against him by the writer of it, Anthony felt in his heart that he must indeed plead guilty.

He realised that for the last five years, and even before that time, he must have appeared both cold and neglectful to the woman who had certainly placed him under the most serious obligations. He *had* utilised his regiment, his country visits, his estate, as excuses for those long absences which, under other circumstances, he could not have endured himself. He knew how bitter, how humiliating, all this must have been for a woman, and such a woman, to endure! He blamed himself, and himself only, and could have found harsher words for the expression of this blame than any she had made use of. Was there, in fact, one single sentence in the whole of her letter which he could honestly and conscientiously refute? Yes; there was one, and one only.

'You seem, lately,' she had written, 'to have forgotten all your obligations to me.' This was untrue. Alas, neither formerly nor lately — neither yesterday, to-day, nor to-morrow — could those fatal 'obligations' become effaced from his mind! The open-eyed world had looked on and seen *the act*. God, and his own heart, knew of the motive which preceded the act and brought it about. Had this first motive, or intention, been good or evil? It would seem like

an effort at self-exculpation were he to endeavour to prove, even to himself, that it had been *good.* Good or evil, it had had, as its root and origin, this haunting, all-pervading, sense of obligation —this overwhelming debt of gratitude, which somehow, and some day, he felt that he was called upon to repay. Whatever boon this woman had asked of him, he would have considered himself bound to grant, and when she had seemed to crave only for his love, he had given her the best that it was then in his power to give. But, since that time, he had known another woman, and had loved her with another love, and he knew now how worthless was the reward he had given, more than ten years ago, to the woman who had saved his life!

When he took his hands from his face, and returned to his own library from his imaginary journey into the Bombay Presidency, he looked haggard and miserable. He had made out, however, confusedly, a plan of action. He would go up to London that very day, seek an interview with the lady, double, or treble, if need be, the amount of the proposed annuity, and make, at any rate, one last desperate fight to recover his freedom.

He picked up the letter, which had fluttered on to the carpet, and repairing to the morning-room, rang the bell for the butler.

'Well, Colonel!' cried Captain Sparshott from his easy-chair, as Anthony re-entered the room; 'I'm still taken up with the future Mrs. S——, and can't make out, for the life of me, which she'd better be—a girl or a widow! Worst of a girl is, that you only get to know the best of her first; and the worst of a widow is, that if one got to know the worst of her first, it mightn't be quite so easy to make the best of her afterwards! Hullo! I hope you haven't had bad news!' he exclaimed, breaking off suddenly, and glancing up at Anthony's altered face, and then down at the black-edged letter which he held in his hand.

'Oh, no; nobody's dead that I cared two straws about, but some tiresome business has come upon me, which I ought to get settled up at once, and I'm afraid I shall have to leave you and go up to London this morning. There's no train, is there, before the 3.15?' he inquired, turning to the butler, who had answered the bell.

'You could just catch the four minutes to one, sir,' replied the man, looking at his watch, 'if I ordered the dog-cart, and you started off now—

immediately. I could put your evening things in the bag, and send you up the small portmanteau to-morrow.'

'That'll do capitally, Jervis. Good-bye, my dear Charlie. Behave as if you were in your own house, and do just as you like about shooting and riding, and waiting till I can get back. I may be kept in town for a day or two.'

'I'll just wait till the first post to-morrow, and then go up by this same train,' returned Captain Sparshott, wringing his friend's hand. 'I was meaning to be back by about then; Good-bye!'

Driving post haste on his way to the station, Colonel Hepburn passed the western entrance to Lord Belmorris's park about two hours before Lucy and her cavalier were destined to emerge from it. He had no time to linger or investigate, but he cast a wistful glance through the iron gateways and down the long avenue which led to the castle. He saw nobody however. It would have been strange indeed if he had perceived the form he was seeking, but yet, sometimes, such wonderful coincidences had a way of coming to pass! . . .

He caught the train by a miracle, secured a

carriage to himself, endeavoured to read, to smoke, and finally, to sleep,—anything,—anything,—to make the day pass which had begun so miserably!

The weather, which, in the north, had been crisp and frosty, grew damp and foggy as he neared London. It was as if all nature lay shrouded and buried away beneath a grey pall of desolation. The cold was intense, and seemed to penetrate to the very marrow of his bones. He drew on the 'Old Campaigner,' which he had meant to use merely as a railway-wrap, and fastened it round his throat with the military loops and 'frogs.' Then, plunging his hands, for warmth, into the depths of the wide pockets, he endeavoured, once more, to court oblivion in sleep.

In the right-hand pocket of the coat he encountered some sort of soft gossamer substance. He drew it forth and examined it by the light of the lamp, for, by this time, all was darkness without. A woman's handkerchief, with a lace edging, a border of pink stripes, and 'Lucy' embroidered in the corner! The old housekeeper at Falconborough, when the coat was returned to her, had carefully pulled down the sleeves and restored the belt to its slides, but she had evidently omitted to search in the pockets.

To Anthony, however, unaware as he was that his 'old campaigner' had once been folded round Lucy's graceful form, this discovery, just as his heart was so full of regretful emotions, seemed almost to partake of the character of the supernatural; a circumstance quite worthy of being communicated to the Council of 'the Society for Psychical Research,' supposing it to have been then in existence; and astonishment as to how he could possibly have become possessed of what was to him like a sacred and beloved relic, had the effect of banishing his more melancholy thoughts for the remainder of the journey.

He arrived in London at about half-past seven, dined—that is to say, endeavoured to dine—at a club,—slept, or rather 'assumed the recumbent position,' at Long's Hotel, and drove down to Clapham soon after eleven o'clock upon the following morning.

He crossed the river at Chelsea, skirted Battersea Park, passed under a succession of railway viaducts, and so came, by-and-by, to the 'Cedars Road,' where the air seemed to grow purer and more countrified. Arrived at the top of the hill, he directed his cabman to the right, past the scarlet pillar-post-box, and then,—for the first

time during the drive,—he recalled his wandering spirit and began to observe the objects in his material path.

The Common lay extended to his left, and presented a gay and animated appearance, notwithstanding that the branches of its trees were naked and its gorse-bushes blossomless. Some boys were sending their dogs into the pond to swim after sticks, and several young couples were strolling forth in the wintry sunshine.

When he came within sight of the public bench under the seven lime-trees upon which he had been sitting when Lucy had perceived him from her window, he called out to his cabman to drive slowly. He wanted to take a good look at Barlow Lodge, the place that was Lucy's home, and where she would be, in all human probability, and barring, of course, any terrible catastrophe attended with loss of life upon the line of the Great Northern Railway, at about eight o'clock upon the evening of that very day. He would have recognised at once, from her chance description, and without even looking at the name upon the gate-post, the 'peaceful-looking little Queen Anne house, standing between two much larger ones,' with its unpretending exterior, and prim

Adams decorations. The lime-tree just inside the protecting wall, being naked as its fellows without, he was enabled to take in the entire house at a glance, and his eyes lingered lovingly over every detail.

As he was looking up at it, a buxom maid-servant, with bare arms, threw open one of the bedroom windows, and set out, upon the sill, some long strips of ermine-trimming,—(no doubt, he thought, the property of the old lady). Within he could perceive a waving white curtain, and a little square of trellisy wall paper.

Was not this Lucy's room, which she had told him looked out upon the Common, and which was being made ready for her home-coming? . . .

'God bless you, little white-curtained room!' he murmured with emotion.

But the hansom cab, creeping slowly along according to orders, had now arrived at the gate of 'The Aspens,' and, hardening his heart, he sprang out of it and rang the bell, almost over-setting, as he dashed abstractedly across the foot-way, an extremely pompous-looking individual, arrayed in well-brushed broadcloth and creaking boots,—who was evidently making his way to Clapham Junction, for he carried in his hand a

small black bag, upon which the initials '*S. A. P.*' were painted in white letters.

To this gentleman,—in whom the reader will no doubt have recognized an acquaintance,—Anthony Hepburn proffered a hurried excuse, which, however, was somewhat gruffly received, and, following the lead of Mrs. Van Buren's boy-in-buttons, he went into the jungly drawing-room to do battle with fate.

CHAPTER X.

The departure of Lucy and the Binks family from Belmorris Castle was something of an undertaking, seeing that the party numbered in all five souls, and included two confirmed invalids, for Lady Mabella and her attendant, Mrs. Guffy, considered themselves fully entitled to this designation.

Lord Belmorris, who had accompanied his relatives to the station, and was assisting Lucy and Adeliza to grapple with their small baggage, caught sight, upon the platform, of a groom in the Hepburn livery.

'Colonel going up by this train?' he inquired carelessly, whilst Lucy's cheeks became suffused with crimson.

'Colonel went up yesterday, my lord,' replied the man; 'quite unexpected, and I've just driven down with his portmanteau and Captain Sparshott.'

It was now Adeliza's turn to blush. Captain Sparshott going up to London by this very train!

Oh, if he could only be induced to get into their carriage! But the compartment, although its full complement of passengers was not actually made up,—what with rugs, air-cushions, dressing-cases, luncheon-baskets, umbrellas, and foot-warmers,—presented already an appearance of being unpleasantly crammed; the Belmorris footman, who was at least six-feet-two in height, was standing like a dragon at the door, and it was highly probable, Adeliza feared, that unless Algy was told off at once, to drag him up, as it were by the hair of the head, the Captain might elect to take his place in a smoking-carriage. Yielding, therefore, to Adeliza's whispered entreaties, Algernon Binks, as there were still a few moments to spare, started off in search of him.

He was discovered at the book-stall, in the act of supplying himself with novels and society journals, smoking an enormous cigar.

'My mother and sister are in the train,' said Algy, after the first greeting, pointing to where the gigantic footman was standing like a sentinel.

The Captain made at once for the carriage as though impelled by some irresistible magnetic force.

Adeliza flew forward to the window wreathed in smiles.

'I see your carriage is quite full,' he observed, after he had glanced inside it, and assuming an expression of disappointment, he made as though about to take his place elsewhere.

'Oh, no, it's not!' exclaimed Adeliza persuasively; 'we've got heaps of room for you! *Do come!*'

'No, no, I shall only crowd you!' returned the Captain, making a last effort to escape.

'We're not so exclusive as not to be able to make room for *a friend!*' cried Miss Binks, whilst her bright eyes seemed to be saying ten thousand flattering things.

'But I'm smoking,' pleaded the gallant Lancer, looking at his newly-lighted cigar. He felt like some poor fly, struggling helplessly in the meshes of a most seductive spider.

'Never mind your cigar!' exclaimed Addie, perceiving that he wavered, and assuming almost a tone of command.

A guard, shouting, 'Take your place, sir!' came behind him at this moment, and the gigantic footman opened the carriage-door and assisted him on to the step. Adeliza held out her neatly gloved hand with a bewitching smile. He took hold of it, flung aside his cigar, and, in another second, found

himself in the bosom of the Binks family, and hemmed in on all sides with their belongings.

Lord Belmorris waved his hand in farewell, hurling a somewhat despairing glance towards the corner where Lucy was sitting, the gigantic footman touched his hat respectfully, and the train glided out of the station on its way to London.

In order that Captain Sparshott might occupy a place next to Miss Binks, it was suggested, soon after the commencement of the journey, that Mrs. Guffy, who declined to travel second-class during the winter months, on account of the draughts, should change over, and sit upon the opposite side, between Algernon and Lucy, for Lady Mabella, besides being unable to travel with her back to the engine, had been enjoined by her medical adviser to 'assume the recumbent position' whenever she went upon a journey, and this, of course, necessitated the occupation of two seats.

Guffy, however, had always chosen to imagine that she could no more sit with her back to the engine than could her mistress, and she at once put on an expression of martyrdom, which, Adeliza feared, must have been very annoying to Captain Sparshott, whom she was, of course,

anxious to impress favourably. She hoped that, by taking no notice of Guffy's affectations, she would end perhaps by becoming resigned, and that she might even seek solace in slumber, and thus enable Captain Sparshott and herself to converse in comfort, which would be, of course, utterly out of the question if they were liable to be interrupted every moment by groans and complaints.

Algy, however, had been greatly annoyed by having Guffy, whom he could not endure, placed between Lucy and himself. Foreseeing that his mother, if not actually asleep, would close her eyes, and feign slumber, in order to escape from the fatigue of having to join in the conversation, and that Adeliza and the Captain would probably engage in a sort of semi-sentimental banter in which he could take no part, he had imagined that he would have had his cousin Lucy entirely to himself during the whole of the journey up to town; and, besides the fact that he was, as he had expressed it, decidedly 'spoony upon her,' he had determined, not only to endeavour to find out how matters stood between herself and his 'Uncle Belmorris,' but also, to rally her on the impression she had apparently made upon the heart of

the haughty and inscrutable Colonel, who, until now, had never been looked upon as 'a marrying man.' He would have produced, perhaps, from his pocket, the letter he had received that very morning from Colonel Hepburn, allowing her only to glance at a portion of its contents, in order that he might 'get a rise out of her,' and revel in her discomfiture and mystification. All this, however, had been frustrated by the inopportune intrusion of Guffy; and as he was a spoilt child, and accustomed to be given way to in everything, he was at no pains to conceal his irritation. His sister kicked at him beneath the fur railway-rug in order to induce him to keep quiet, but he only kicked her back in return, and seemed seriously disposed to lose his temper. Just as Guffy had, apparently, subsided into a state of resentful torpor, he roused her up again, and requested that she would change places with Lucy, (who was sitting also with her back towards the engine, in the corner nearest to the right-hand window, immediately opposite to Captain Sparshott), so that he and his cousin might be enabled to converse together at their ease, without being obliged, as must now happen, to talk uncomfortably across the lap of an intermediate person. Guffy, how-

ever, who had a perfect horror of draughts, flatly refused to sit next to the window, notwithstanding that this one was closed.

'I'm sorry I *dursn't* oblige you, sir,' Adeliza could hear her protesting in a peevish undertone; 'but it would be as much as my *life* was worth, I can *assure you* it would!'

Algernon and Guffy went wrangling on after this fashion until they had effectually aroused Lady Mabella from her pretended slumber, who forthwith discovered, to her horror, that a dressing-bag, containing some extremely valuable articles of jewelry, had mysteriously disappeared. This intelligence very naturally filled every member of the Binks family with consternation; Guffy became loud in her lamentations, whilst, at the same time, exonerating herself from all blame, and Lucy adventured a few words of sympathy and hope.

Nothing could have exceeded the kindness and courtesy of Captain Sparshott at this trying moment. He searched high and low, in the carriage, for the missing bag, groped under the seats, and shook up the cushions and railway-rugs, until he had raised such a cloud of dust that he and his fellow-passengers were well-nigh

smothered by it; after which, seeing that the bag was nowhere to be found, he turned mournfully to his newspapers with the manner of a person who has lost a friend. After bewailing her loss for about three-quarters of an hour, Lady Mabella, acting upon Captain Sparshott's advice, determined to send a telegram to her brother, in order to ascertain whether, after all, the missing bag might not merely have been left at the Castle. Neither Lady Mabella, Algernon, nor Guffy, appeared to have about them such a thing as a shilling, and Adeliza remembered to have left her purse in the pocket of her ulster-coat, which was strapped up with the umbrellas and walking-sticks, and as they were just arriving at a station, there was no time to get these undone.

Before Lucy had been able to find her money, (for her new serge travelling-jacket had almost too many pockets to be convenient), the good-natured Captain had produced the modest sum required, and, as he was seated nearest to the door, he dashed out of the carriage as soon as the train came to a standstill, in order to send off the message.

Adeliza endured a moment of real agony when

the train began showing symptoms of moving on again before Captain Sparshott had returned. She darted to the window, beckoning to him frantically, and was just in time to save him from stepping, in a fit of abstraction, no doubt, into the wrong carriage.

The gloom occasioned by the loss of the bag cleared off a little after this, particularly as Adeliza suddenly remembered that she was almost certain that she had seen it placed under one of the seats in the waggonette, where, in all probability, it still remained. It was felt, however, that, after so much worry and anxiety, a little luncheon would be by no means unacceptable, and Algy set to work, with a will, to unpack the basket. Chicken-and-ham sandwiches, a cold pheasant, properly dissected, hard-boiled eggs, delicious rolls, with salt, pepper, mustard, an enormous bunch of hothouse grapes, and two bottles of red wine, everything, so it seemed, that the soul of the hungry and thirsty wayfarer could possibly desire! . . . .

'Gracious Heavens!' exclaimed Adeliza, when they had all satisfied their first cravings; 'if those idiotic servants haven't forgotten to put in a tumbler!'

It was too true! . . . The Belmorris butler had counted, probably, upon Lady Mabella's silver drinking-cup, which he had had cleaned up for her upon the previous evening, and which had always proved so useful upon long journeys, but this, alas, was at the bottom of the missing bag! Captain Sparshott, however, immediately came to the rescue, and produced from a magnificently-appointed travelling-bag, which seemed to contain almost every necessity and superfluity of life, a bright silver cup embellished with his coat-of-arms.

'Why is it,' said Adeliza, addressing the Captain in a whisper, 'that younger sons always have everything so very nice?'

Now, seeing that this was the Captain's own drinking-cup, which he had proffered voluntarily, for the benefit of his fellow-travellers, he felt constrained to drink out of it the very last of all, and so, refused absolutely to put it to his lips until every one of the occupants of the railway-carriage, including Guffy, had thoroughly quenched their thirst, by which time its lustre was considerably dimmed, and it had grown to be somewhat thumbed and crumby.

He rinsed it out superficially, and gave the

rim a rub over with newspaper, but he felt that it would be neither complimentary, nor in good taste, to wipe it too much, and so, did not particularly relish the dregs of the last bottle of light claret which fell to his share.

After this, all went well until the train stopped again, when Guffy, perceiving a boy with a tray strapped to his chest, and having been rendered thirsty by the chicken-and-ham sandwiches, became possessed of an insatiable craving to indulge in an orange.

There was nothing for it but to gratify her, and until she had finished eating it, and had handed the pips and peeling to Captain Sparshott to throw out of the window, he being seated in the place nearest to the doorway, it was useless to dream of settling down comfortably to literature, conversation, or slumber. The wintry daylight, however, was now fast drawing to a close. Lucy could scarcely see to read the book in which she had been trying to interest herself in spite of these frequent interruptions, and, at the last station, where they had purchased the orange for Guffy, a porter had climbed upon the top of the carriage and hurled down a lamp into its appointed aperture. . . . Perhaps, (Adeliza said to herself,

with a fluttering heart,) there were going to be tunnels! . . .

Tunnels there were, in a little while, sure enough, added to which, it gradually became totally dark outside. The train went tearing on, through space, at a terrific rate, for it was almost twenty-five minutes behind time, and was endeavouring to make up speed. They would not stop again, Captain Sparshott said, for 'a perfect age.'

Lucy was leaning back in her corner with closed eyes, and had not spoken a word for some time; Algernon and Guffy, tired out, as it seemed, with their wrangling, had subsided into silence, and Lady Mabella commenced making preparations for a real sleep. The glare of the lamp, however, she found, came directly in her eyes, and Captain Sparshott rose at once to remedy the evil. There was a small blue curtain upon one side of the lamp, which, when drawn down, and looped over the light, made quite an effectual screen. The carriage was now plunged in almost total darkness,—a sound, as of a gentle snore, came now and again from Lady Mabella's corner. . . . Adeliza experienced a delightful sense of mystery. To all intents and purposes,

she and the Captain had every right to consider themselves alone; and when two people find themselves as it were 'alone in a crowd,'—particularly when the crowd is asleep,—they are apt, somehow, to feel more than usually drawn together in their isolation.

Some sentiment of this kind may possibly have animated Captain Sparshott's gallant breast, for moving nearer to his only waking companion, he felt underneath the fur railway-rug and obtained possession of her hand. . . .

But just at this moment, a loud exclamation from Algy awakened the sleepers, and caused the two young people suddenly to unclasp their hands.

It now transpired that Guffy, in consequence, as she declared, of having been forced to travel with her back to the engine, had just communicated to Algy that she was feeling exceedingly unwell; in fact, that ever since leaving the station at which she had insisted upon purchasing the orange, she had felt exactly as if she 'was sailing upon a vessel!'

Everybody, including even Lady Mabella, started simultaneously to their feet upon hearing this news, and displayed signs of the keenest

perturbation. What was to be done? . . . There was not a moment to be lost! . . . Captain Sparshott remembered that he had a flask, containing brandy, in his magnificent though somewhat cumbrous dressing-bag, and it was hauled down for the second time, and the remedy promptly administered.

Guffy, however, declared that she could sit no longer with her back to the engine, and Algy was now strongly of opinion that she ought not to run any such risk. The only safe way by which the travellers could protect themselves from a recurrence of these distressing symptoms, was by arranging that Guffy should go over to the other side, and sit facing the engine; but, in this case, she would have to change places with either Adeliza or Captain Sparshott, and thus prevent them from occupying adjoining seats. Of course, if Algernon could have been persuaded to move over likewise, all might yet have been well, but he had now slipped into the invalid's place, next to Lucy's corner, and declared that nothing would induce him to sit near Guffy again, and that he was not going to be ordered about 'from pillar to post.' By thoroughly re-organizing the disposal of the places, Adeliza and the Captain might still

have been enabled to sit together, but this, besides looking, perhaps, a little too marked, would have necessitated the shifting of the greater portion of the 'cargo,' which, together with creating dust, would have seriously disturbed Lady Mabella, who was again endeavouring to court a well-earned repose.

Owing, therefore, to Algernon's incorrigible obstinacy, and to Guffy's captiousness, Adeliza foresaw that she and her admirer were destined to be separated during the rest of the journey; for Captain Sparshott was not the kind of person who could look on at a female in distress, no matter what was her social position, without doing everything in his power to assist her. He changed over, therefore, at once, and settled himself in the place which Algernon had just vacated.

All hope, Adeliza felt, together with all hand-pressing, was over and done with for this afternoon, at least! . . .

'Well, Guffy,' she relieved her feelings by whispering, as the cantankerous lady's maid established herself by her side; 'I must say that you certainly *are* an old brute!' and the Captain, who was now too far off to catch her remark,—

noticed the 'wildish look' in her eye to which he had alluded in his conversation with Anthony Hepburn.

But I have already dwelt at too great a length upon the vicissitudes of the journey.

In due course of time, and without any further *contretemps*, Lucy, Captain Sparshott, the Binkses, and Mrs. Guffy arrived in London.

'I can see Upjohn waiting upon the platform,' said Adeliza, putting her head out of the window as the train glided into the station.

Joseph Upjohn was the one male retainer of the Binks family. He presented the appearance of a boy, but was much older than he looked, having been taken by the late Mr. Binks either direct from the plough or the choir, and pressed into service for a merely nominal wage, in the hope that he might one day turn out to be a valuable acquisition. He possessed, however, a large appetite and small ambitions, and had never improved.

At railway stations, and all places where there was much traffic, he displayed terror, standing as one paralysed, with his arms in the position of the lower sails of a windmill. Upon the present occasion he was worse than useless,

and, but for the 'honour and glory of the family,' might just as well have remained at home.

Captain Sparshott, assisted by Adeliza, (for Algernon was far too selfish to do anything which entailed trouble, whilst Guffy's prostration only just enabled her to crawl to a four-wheeled cab,) succeeded, however, in recognizing the luggage,—amongst which, to Lady Mabella's intense relief, was discovered the missing bag, which had been labelled and put into the van by mistake; and after despatching a second telegram to apprise Lord Belmorris of this fortunate circumstance, securing his own portmanteau, and remunerating the porters, he sprang into a hansom-cab, and drove off to his club.

Lucy accompanied her relatives in their double-brougham, as far as Wilton Place, after which she and her trunk were transferred to a cab; and bidding her aunt and cousins an affectionate farewell, she took her way, *viâ* Cadogan Place, Sloane Street, and Sloane Square, to the Chelsea Embankment, and thence to Clapham Common.

Perhaps it was not altogether consistent in Lady Mabella, who, besides being, as her daughter had said, 'so very particular,' had the lowest pos-

sible opinion of London cabmen, to send her young and lovely niece so far afield alone and unprotected, after the foggy darkness had set in.

Lady Mabella, however, like a great many of her neighbours, did not always behave with perfect consistency. It would have been indecorous in the highest degree, for Algernon to have escorted his cousin, although he had expressed his willingness to do so; Guffy's health was, of course, quite unequal to the exertion, and Upjohn's services were required, just then, to 'help up' with the boxes. Lady Mabella, therefore, salved her conscience by asking Adeliza to write down the cabman's number, and packed Lucy off with a blessing.

Lucy's cabman,—except for one or two unimportant deviations, resulting from individuality of character,—proceeded on his way by the same route which had been taken, that very morning, by the driver of Colonel Hepburn's 'hansom.'

At the gate of the unpretending little Queen-Anne house, Sarah the parlour-maid was waiting to receive her.

'Glad to see you back home again, Miss Lucy! . . . I hope I see you quite well? . . . How much is it, cabman? . . .'

'Four-and-sixpence the fare, Miss, and twopence extra for outside luggage,' answered the wicked cabman, seeing that he had to do only with beings of the weaker and more confiding sex. For such wretches,—had Dante ever suffered by their extortions,—he would surely have reserved a hot corner in his '*Inferno!*' The unsophisticated Sarah, however, delighted at the return of her youthful mistress, instead of handing him two-and-eightpence with a jeer of derision, immediately paid the money, and even added a cheerful 'Good evening, cabman!' the outcome of her trustful and ingenuous heart, as the villain drove back to London, well pleased.

Lucy cast one look in the direction of the blurred gas-lamp, which, but for the clinging fog, might have revealed to her the public bench over the way, beneath the now leafless limes,—then she followed Sarah into the house with a sigh.

The little storm-tossed bark had returned to its peaceful haven—Barlow Lodge once more,—with its Chippendale furniture, blue ginger-pots, and prim eighteenth-century calm!

CHAPTER XI.

'Ah, my dear young lady,' said the old French professor, some weeks after Lucy's second return home, as he contemplated the staircase window at Barlow Lodge, with its heraldic blind; 'I had imagined, nay, I had made sure, that on your coming back, I should have been informed that some noble device must be painted, without delay, inside that escutcheon in outline! . . . . My honourable, but unfortunate friend, Benvenuto Rossi,—unfortunate from the circumstances of his private life, as well as from his loss of fortune,—and who was breakfasting with me this morning, has never succeeded in chasing from his memory the enchanting apparition which confronted him here, when he called to display to your aunt his completed achievement. . . . "How is that charming young lady who has the *fisonomia* of Beatrice Cenci?" he inquired; "when am I to be summoned to her gentle and dignified presence in

order that, to the long roll of illustrious devices which I had the honour to copy according to my poor ability, I may add that of her promised husband?" '

'I'm sorry we can't give your friend this little commission,' replied Lucy, smiling rather sadly, as she thought of an 'illustrious device' which she had seen upon a pair of ivory hair-brushes, and, also, upon the blinkers of a horse harnessed to a certain dog-cart. 'Is he really so badly off?'

'Like myself,' returned the Marquis, 'he has passed through vicissitudes. He has been forsaken by those who should have consoled him by their affection, and the misfortunes arising from the errors and follies of his youth have overshadowed his riper years. Happily, however, he is possessed of the artistic and imaginative temperament. He exists chiefly in a world peopled by the creations of his own brain, and these, at least, have remained his friends.'

This speech aroused in Lucy a painful memory — a memory which, now, was never entirely asleep.

'"The errors and follies of his youth!" ' she repeated half absently. 'Ah, tell me,' she added

suddenly, as she looked up eagerly into the old man's face; 'you travelled, didn't you, long ago, with several young Englishmen who wanted to see the world; amongst them was there one named Anthony Hepburn?'

'"Anthony Hepburn?"' repeated the professor, looking surprised; 'so you are acquainted with Anthony Hepburn—you have seen him?'

'Yes, I have seen him,' she answered, looking down; 'tell me about him when he was quite a boy—before everything happened?'

'You know, then, about "everything." He has told you the history of his life. The ideal man and the ideal woman of my dreams have met, then, at last; but alas! when it is too late!'

'You are quite sure that we have met too late?' She asked this in a tone of almost hopeless resignation, as though the old man's words had merely confirmed an impression already existing in her own mind.

'I fear so, my child; and if, as I divine from your manner, you take more than an ordinary interest in my gallant friend, I can only recommend you to try to become resigned to what appears to be the almost universal doom of poor

humanity! Sad comfort, certainly, but it is the best I can offer! What says one of our most cultivated writers—a man who, having thoroughly investigated facts, has, in consequence, a right to be listened to? "*S'il se trouvait*, he says, '*par hasard, deux êtres capables de ressentir un amour réel, ils ne se rencontraient pas, ou se trouvaient dans la vie placés dos à dos; chacun des deux se trouvait apparié avec un être d'une autre nature.*" '*

'And is it always like this?'

'Nothing in life is *always*,—constant inconstancy,—the certainty that all is uncertain,—caprice,—variety,—mutability; our small existences are composed of these elements, for the life of prescribed and regulated stagnation is only for those beings who can put forth no wings with which to escape from it! Those of the finer *pâte* must be for ever struggling and expecting; hoping the good thing whilst they foresee the evil, knowing that by their tears they are earning the sunshine of coming smiles, and more free, consequently, in a dungeon than those others are in a palace! Of such a nature is the philosopher, and it is this awaiting the unexpected, this knowledge that we are unable to go

* Alphonse Karr.

entirely by precedent, which makes our existences tolerable at all.'

'I should like to think that one might always hope,' said Lucy, sadly.

'You may think it, my child, but yet it would be wiser to cultivate the nature that can say, "What signifies this sorrow or this exultation? When the earth itself is of so little importance, what matter the contortions of the individual worm?" This is what I have been saying to-day to our friend the Colonel.'

'"*To-day!*"' repeated Lucy aghast—'you have seen him to-day? Colonel Hepburn has been here?'

'Certainly,' returned the old Frenchman; 'why should he not be here? We have been consulting together, turning matters over, and endeavouring to arrive at satisfactory conclusions; but, like most Englishmen, he has been too reserved; he has been afraid of betraying, even to so old a friend, his hidden motives. He has talked to me about what I already knew, but he has said not one word to show me that he had met you. You shall tell me all about it yourself.'

'He has been here,' exclaimed Lucy, as though

not heeding the Professor's words; 'and he didn't care to come and see me! He knows where I live. He knows that I must be waiting and hoping, and he has never wished to see me when he has been quite close to my door! Ah, who would think that he could be so cruel!'

'You shall tell me about all this when you are calmer,' said the old man, soothingly; 'for, at present, it all seems like a mystery. Do not think, however, that our friend is cruel. He dreads only too much the idea of giving pain. He is for bearing all the suffering himself.'

But Lucy felt crushed with humiliation at the news she had just heard. Anthony so near to her, yet passing by without pausing at her door? Was she then as nothing to him after all? Did men always speak and act so lightly? Why had no one warned her that they were creatures who could neither feel love nor pity? Before she had recovered from her agitation she heard her great-aunt's black silk dress rustling upon the staircase; another moment and Miss Elizabeth entered the little sitting-room, and all signs of emotion had to be suppressed.

Lucy looked at her with yearning and disappointment in her glance. An old woman (she

found herself thinking) who had lived so very, very long, and endured the monotony of rising up and lying down so very often, and who yet had known none of those soul-stirring and absorbing emotions which enable us poor mortals to find something of divine inspiration in the most prosaic act! A woman who had looked, morning and evening, for so very many years in her glass, in order to make herself neat, and comely, and attractive, for nobody in particular; who had wandered, peradventure, in the days of her far-off youth, by ocean, and wood, and running stream, unglorified and unscathed by the faintest spark of that sacred fire! A woman, born a woman, but who had learnt nothing to make her forgive the destiny which had cursed her with the narrower vision—the weaker arm. A woman, whom no lover had ever held in his embrace, whom no child had ever called by the sacred name of mother. How little could such a woman know of life, despite the passing of those seventy-seven years!

Looking for consolation and sympathy in her great-aunt's withered face, Lucy seemed, with her newly-awakened eyes, to read in it no trace of bygone struggles, of heart-aches

over-passed, temptations overcome, or affections blighted.

'Oh, if I had only a mother!' was the cry that came now constantly from her heart. 'I could tell her about all this, and she could advise, and comfort, and understand!'

It will be surmised from the foregoing pages that the horny hand of adversity had descended somewhat heavily upon the Lucy of my story. A letter from Anthony Hepburn, received upon the day after her return home, was what had dealt her the first blow. It ran thus:—

'I must write to you the saddest words that I have ever had to write. I hope to God that to *you*, who are at a more hopeful time of life, they may be less bitter to read than they are to write. We spoke, you may remember, when last we met, of what I fancied must surely happen in time. I ought to have waited for this time before speaking to you of my feelings, but I feared it might be long in coming, and love made me impatient. *Now*, what I hoped for seems further from my reach than ever, and, indeed, an unexpected circumstance which has lately taken place, may render it altogether impossible. My natural impulse would be to ask

you still to wait; I might delay the pain of bidding you farewell, in the hope that, after all, the words need never be said. But by temporising thus I might ruin your happiness as well as my own. Brighter prospects may open out before you, and I have no right to blight them. I can only implore you, therefore, to forgive me, and I feel that I ought to ask you to forget me as well. This, however, I cannot bring myself to do quite yet. I long to occupy a little corner in your memory, and I long, too, to be able to make you believe that I am not really quite so heartless or so selfish as I must appear to you to be. You must think of me as of a doomed wretch who cannot now hope for any true happiness in life, and that this is owing to my own folly does not make my fate seem to be less bitter. *You*, however, deserve that your future should be bright and unclouded, and I will not darken it with the shadow of my misfortunes. I wish I might once more call you my own Lucy, and hold you again, for one moment, in my arms. The day when I did so will always seem to me the happiest and most triumphant day of my life. Pray believe this, and believe, also, that I loved you, and love you now, better than any other woman I have

ever either known or dreamed of. Good-bye, and may God bless you always.—A. H.'

Lucy had kept this letter folded to her bosom by day and by night, feeling that she could almost forgive its terrible significance for the sake of the concluding words.

To a *woman* there is so much, *too* much, perhaps, in a declaration of affection. A *man*, once he has delivered himself of these verbal assurances, is apt to imagine that the lady of his heart will consider herself loved once for all, and will rest contented with the deeds that go to prove it. These she will accept with all thankfulness if she be worth the serving, but ever, in her heart of hearts, will linger a secret yearning after the joy begotten of spoken words, and something will seem still to be wanting, unless she can hear repeated, from time to time, those delightful formulas expressive of an enduring passion.

Most men, however, once they have captured and secured their bond-slaves, dole out these precious words with a disheartening parsimony, as though they dreaded the exhaustion of some sort of commodity, or stock-in-trade, which would become more valuable in the hoarding—like old port. And it may be that the love of 'making

scenes,' of which women are often accused, has something to do with this mistaken economy, and with this feminine longing, so often ungratified, for words and protestations. Since, in the dramatic situations and emergencies of life, be they situations suited for congratulation or for condolence, a man may produce these hidden treasures from the depths of his being, just as he will send down to the cellar for his choicest vintages upon the occasion of marriage-breakfast or funeral-feast. He will *write*, however, sometimes, what he is so chary of *saying*, and hence the joy and delight of love-letters. At the beginning, perhaps, and, almost certainly, at the *ending* of his letter, he will let his pen run on, if only from indolence, and the force of habit, into the old familiar groove; and thus it happens that to a woman, the letters of the man she loves are so inexpressibly precious, so terribly difficult, always, to tear up or burn!

Lucy Barlow had now in her possession one of these priceless treasures. A declaration of despairing affection written by that beloved hand, addressed to herself, and signed 'A. H.', and it was impossible, therefore, for her to be altogether miserable.

For, to a girl, young, loving, imaginative, but ignorant as yet of the dominating passions of existence, the notion of marriage, with all its new responsibilities, and severing of old associations, is not always very attractive in itself. Her longings and aspirations are often as well fulfilled by an idea as by a reality, and the secret consciousness that she is loved will atone to her for the absence of the material lover. A romance, an inspiration to all good and noble deeds, a companion who can be with her, in imagination in all solitudes; this, with a vague sense of something nearer, dearer, and altogether incomprehensible, which may be awaiting her in the far future, will generally suffice to her until she has tasted of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; and to Lucy, during the first few weeks after her return home, the warm love within her heart, and the treasured letter outside it, seemed to ensure her an immunity from all doubts and uncertainties, even if she might never now hope to be Anthony Hepburn's wife.

So, like Elaine, she 'lived in fantasy,' until the New Year was past, and the first days of the chilly English spring were close at hand, when the trees in Miss Elizabeth's little garden, as well

as the limes upon the Common beyond, began to show signs of breaking into tender leaf, and the sparrows commenced twittering and coquetting upon the house-tops.

But then, influenced, it may be, by the same universal law which orders the budding of limes and the pairing of sparrows, there came into her heart an intense and insatiable longing to look once more upon the face of the man she loved, and to hear his voice.

So the days went by, feverish, expectant, uneventful days, but still, not altogether barren of hope.

Clapham Common, now, had become, as it were, hallowed ground. It was some sort of consolation, as the weather grew warmer, to stroll across the road, and sit down upon the bench underneath the seven sacred limes, and to know that he had sat there one morning, reading his newspaper, and smoking his cigarette, unconscious of her straining eyes!

Talking of newspapers, she had induced her Aunt to exchange the *Standard*, the Tory organ Miss Elizabeth had formerly patronised, for the *Morning Post*, and she had been rewarded by beholding Colonel Hepburn's name in print,

amongst those of the officers present at the annual regimental dinner of the 18th Lancers at Willis's Rooms. Lucy's ideas with regard to such dinners were, naturally enough, extremely vague, and without actually believing that officers who failed to attend them were either cashiered or shot as deserters, she rightly imagined that the Colonel's absence from so important a 'function' might be remarked and commented upon. Had she seen it chronicled in the newspaper that he had attended a *ball*, or any social gathering of a frivolous description, she might, perhaps, have felt somewhat shocked and disheartened; deeming that, for anyone placed in so unfortunate a situation, it would be unseemly to caper and pirouette with careless worldlings. Nevertheless, as she looked out over the walls of her narrow garden, she found herself contemplating London with altogether different eyes. *He* was there, probably, pacing its noisy streets, mingling with its teaming human life, breathing the atmosphere which, seen from a distance, looked so murky and obscure. . . . Oh, if she could only be in London, too! . . . . Then, in the midst of all this longing and uncertainty, came the news that he had actually been within almost a stone's

throw of her! . . . . He had 'looked up' the old fellow with whom he had travelled, long ago, as a 'kind of tutor;' but he had not taken the trouble to turn aside even to knock at her door! . . . He had passed by the peaceful-looking little Queen-Anne house, in which he must have known that she was waiting and hoping! . . . . Ah, men could, indeed, find it in their hearts to be very cruel sometimes! But why should this man select, as his victim, the woman who loved him so much more than anybody else in the whole world?

CHAPTER XII.

In a life so uneventful as that which Lucy was obliged to lead during the giddy season which showers notes and visiting-cards upon the hall-tables of fashionable Londoners, the most trivial circumstance is apt to assume a fictitious importance.

Thus, the drawing up of a brougham, one afternoon, outside the entrance to Barlow Lodge, caused her almost to faint with emotion. She happened to be looking out of her bedroom window at the time, which, but for the screening lime-tree within the wall, would have commanded a full view of the road. As it was, however, she could see quite distinctly that the carriage was a private one. Somebody let down the nearest window. . . . Who could it possibly be? . . . .

Before, however, she had had time to make any conjectures, she recognised the clumsy figure of Upjohn, climbing awkwardly down from the

box-seat. He rang loudly at the bell, and then went back to the carriage-window. Lady Mabella Binks had evidently come to call upon Miss Elizabeth Barlow.

Upon making this discovery, Lucy immediately flew downstairs to apprise her great-aunt, who had lately developed a habit of dropping off to sleep over her knitting, and who would have disliked, above all things, to have been 'taken unawares.'

The old lady was dozing as her niece had anticipated, and it was necessary to arouse her rather suddenly. She muttered, as she woke up, something incoherent about a ship foundering 'off Vigo with all hands;' but after a few hurried words of explanation, was enabled to grasp the situation, and by the time Lucy had gone out to the front door in order to welcome her relatives, had satisfactorily re-assembled her wandering senses.

But, as Lucy looked out into the road, she saw Upjohn remounting the box of the brougham. Lady Mabella had merely deposited her card, and Lucy saw her black-gloved fingers scratching out something with a pencil from a paper, probably inscribed with a list of visits, as the carriage drove off.

Poor Lucy's heart had been set beating, and Miss Elizabeth had been awakened from her dreams, for nothing more than an unsympathetic piece of paste-board. Lady Mabella Binks had 'called,' and, for the present, at least, this was all that came of it!

As the Binks' brougham disappeared in the distance, Lucy could not help experiencing a sense of disappointment. Since her return home, she had been invited more than once to luncheon, and to spend the afternoon in Wilton Place; but, feeling in very indifferent spirits, and somewhat shy of Adeliza's fashionable friends, besides being unwilling to leave her great-aunt, from whom she had lately been a good deal parted, in total solitude, she had declined upon each occasion to avail herself of the invitation. She found herself regretting this now; Adeliza, who was probably still pursuing Captain Sparshott with her attentions, might have been able to tell her something authentic with regard to the Captain's commanding officer. At any rate, when she had found herself actually at Lucy's door, it seemed rather unkind, after all the affection she had professed for her suburban cousin (for the two girls had parted the very best of friends),

not to come in and say a few words of friendly greeting! . . .

Lucy had seen and spoken to her little friend at 'The Aspens' several times since her return from the North. The first time she had done so was only just before the old Frenchman's unwelcome communication.

The child was wandering about, alone, close to the boundaries of Miss Elizabeth's garden, looking very forlorn in her little black frock. She was nursing a large wax doll with a broken nose, which was also dressed in deep mourning.

'Lots of people are dead,' little Lily observed, in explanation. 'The earth must be very full of dead people, and, upstairs, in the nursery, I've got a whole drawer full of dead dolls, so I put my dolly on a black frock to be in mourning for them; and I tell her she must be sure and not die too, or else I shall have to punish her by cutting off her head.'

She looked very solemn and sad, Lucy thought, and her little face wore an expression of quite grown-up pain and anxiety.

'My ayah's dead,' she went on by-and-by; 'God didn't mind her not being white a bit, but took her up to live with Him in Heaven. I dare-say Heaven's a good deal nicer than Clapham!'

'I daresay it is, dear,' Lucy had answered, touched at the child's earnest simplicity. She had already heard of the death of the faithful black woman, and of Mrs. Van Buren's recently assumed widow's weeds. Sorrow, which Lucy now realised, must come, one day, to all who are capable of feeling, had evidently visited this poor child betimes!

'Jane washes and dresses me now,' the little girl had continued, in the same tone of sorrowful regret; 'but she doesn't know how to do it properly, and lets all the soap get into my eyes. She can't make my hair curl with only water, like my ayah could, but has to put it up in paper every night, and so it's in hard knobs all over my head, and I can't go to sleep; but last night, for a great treat, it wasn't curled at all, because Mr. Perkins, who Jane's going to be married to, some day, came in just at my bed-time; but it doesn't signify how I look now, because my Mama's gone down to stay at Brighton. If it wasn't for my dolly, I should be left quite alone.'

Little Lily went prattling on in the half-wise, half-foolish way, in which children are apt to talk, when, through being cut off from the society of companions of their own age, they

have begun to think too soon. Lucy felt for the child in her solitude, and had she been sole mistress of Barlow Lodge, would have straightway lifted her and her doll over the garden-paling, and taken possession of her for the rest of the day. As it was, however, she had to content herself with stroking her golden locks, which certainly looked somewhat tangled and unkempt, and with kissing the little face which seemed too thoughtful and serious for the face of a child.

So, gradually, spring-time turned into summer. The fledgling sparrows began with their independent bird-life, and the seven lime-trees upon the Common, together with their fellows, burst forth into all their fulness of leaf.

The water-cart went regularly to work now, in the road in front of Barlow Lodge, notwithstanding which the dust had blown over the wall and powdered all the nearest flower-beds like a miller's coat. Strawberries became cheaper and cheaper every day, and were being hawked about by thousands upon barrows. Nearly all the men upon the tops of the omnibuses had taken to white hats, and there had been two cases of sunstroke, and one of hydrophobia, in the vicinity of Clapham Common.

Smartly dressed people from London went whirling by the windows on their way to suburban breakfasts and garden-parties, the ladies having, for the most part, (Lucy thought), faces looking like beautiful barbers' blocks as they leant back in their open carriages under white veils and pink parasols. The London season, in a word, was just at its height.

But to Lucy Barlow the summer days brought no glad tidings. Praying and longing ever 'for the touch of a vanished hand,' she waited and watched, hoping, as it seemed, against all hope.

In vain, in vain! Had her image faded entirely from his heart? Was he trifling and flirting in London with women with beautiful doll-faces, like those she saw driving past with the white veils and pink parasols? . . . How much better to have been born like one of these, if, indeed,—as she unjustly assumed from their appearance,—they were merely the frivolous butterflies of fashion, than to possess such an intense capacity for loving, and feeling pain!

During the first days of solitude and disappointment, she derived consolation from the knowledge that Anthony had wrested from her an avowal of her love, deeming, in the innocence

of her heart, that the certainty which he must now feel with regard to her affection would serve to strengthen and confirm his own. Love (she said to herself) begets love. Knowing how inexpressibly dear he had become to her, was it possible that he could find it in his heart to turn from her for ever without even one spoken word of farewell?

But when, looking, as she did, upon the old French professor as an embodiment of all that was experienced and instructive with respect to such matters, she had spoken to him upon this subject—entirely in the abstract—his answers had not been altogether reassuring.

He began with the formula which Lucy had learnt, now, to expect from most of her elders, and which, monotonous though it was, could not, at any rate, be applicable for ever!

'It is difficult,—nay, almost impossible,—to confide to a child of your inexperience my opinion upon such a subject. Quotations from authors who have made it essentially their study do not assist me much. . . . "*Une femme qui avoue qu'elle aime c'est un roi qui abdique;*" here is an applicable quotation. But who is it that avows her love? The person of experience,—the achieved woman.

The woman who has conferred upon her adorer substantial proofs of her friendship and esteem,—who has conferred them, even, with too lavish a hand. Of all this, my dear Miss Lucy, you are still profoundly ignorant.'

'But I shall not remain ignorant always?'

'Decidedly not. During the greater part of your existence you will probably be enrolled amongst those *who know*,—and you will then discover that it produces, often, a demoralizing effect upon a man to be aware that he is too exclusively beloved. It was intended that the affection of the woman should be nourished and developed by the devotion of the man, and it is this endeavour to retain what he may at any moment lose through his neglect, which raises him from the condition of an animal, and makes of him a being capable of enjoying that higher life which is known only to a few, and which cannot be experienced without a complete self-abnegation. But a man will not call forth the grand qualities that lie dormant in his nature,—his chivalry, his fidelity,—the sacrifice of what may have been, until now, an indomitable will, for that which will flourish of itself. You cannot induce him to esteem the passion he inspires because it is greater, or nobler,

or superior to that of another. He will not regard it as a man regards a cabinet specimen. He will esteem it, more often, because he has obtained it with difficulty,—because it droops, fluctuates,—shows signs of becoming extinguished,—because he is obliged constantly to watch, to tend, to encourage, and that, in doing all this, he calls to the surface his nobler qualities. These, you may be sure, do not escape his own notice,—he is surprised at them, and admires them in himself, and so, partly by the growth of his own self-esteem, he is rendered happy in his passion.'

Lucy pondered these words attentively, applying them, of course, to her own case.

Had she, then, been unwise to confess her love? 'You know,—you know! You have known it for a long time!' she had said to him in the library at Falconborough Park, when his arms were around her and his lips so close to her own. If she had left him in doubt as to the true state of her feelings, would he have been less cruel and less regardless of them since?

Then, before she could arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, the Professor had added these somewhat enigmatical words:—

'But all I have said can be of no service to

one of your inexperience. My observations were for the achieved woman. With *you*, my child, it is altogether different. No one, as yet, has uprooted you from the native soil of your innocence and planted you in his garden, and it is not possible for a man to grow weary of a treasure which he has never possessed.'

CHAPTER XIII.

The person styling himself 'Lord Falconborough' had followed up his first visit to Mrs. Van Buren by several other visits of the same description. Each time that he found himself in her presence his admiration for the lady's flashy attractions had increased. He had been enabled to reveal himself upon the occasion of his second visit, thanks to an accidental circumstance. A letter had been brought to Mrs. Van Buren shortly after his arrival. By the expression upon her face, he guessed at once that it was a letter to which she attached some interest, and he begged that she would read it without standing upon ceremony with him. She opened the letter, thereupon, glanced at the first words, and then, with a gesture of petulant impatience, thrust it into her pocket. The envelope, however, had fluttered to the floor. Falconborough picked it up, and was about to return it to its owner, when his keen eye

detected the words 'Falconborough Park' in spite of their being partly hidden by the seal. He divined immediately who the letter was from.

'Why am I for ever pursued by these strange coincidences?' he murmured dreamily, as he gave back the envelope into Mrs. Van Buren's hand.

Naturally enough, she begged that he would explain himself further; whereupon, drawing from his little finger a signet-ring, he handed it to Mrs. Van Buren and begged her to compare it with the seal upon her letter.

The same two heraldic creatures which had been observed by Lucy Barlow upon hair-brush and blinker! A facsimile of the armorial bearings upon the seal of Mrs. Van Buren's letter, only surmounted—in the case of the signet-ring—by a Viscount's coronet!

Fuller explanations followed in due course. The young 'nobleman' revealed his pretended relationship to Anthony Hepburn, and described—more or less correctly—the circumstances which had brought him into connexion with Mr. Podmore and his affairs.

Mrs. Van Buren had never heard Colonel Hepburn refer to any such first-cousin,—nor had he ever mentioned to her that there had arisen a

claimant to his new estates. But his accession to the Falconborough property had occurred at a time when the confidential relations, which may be assumed to have existed once, between him and the wife of the Anglo-Indian official, had apparently ended for ever, and, even at their very beginning, he had never spoken to her much about his private affairs. The close of the dramatic, or emotional, period, had not been followed, in this instance, by the dawning of a more enduring friendship. The recollections of the preference which Mrs. Van Buren had manifested for him in the past, oppressed Anthony, it is true, with an almost unendurable sense of obligation in the present. He was unable to forget the smallest detail connected with his Indian adventure, and he was not the kind of man who, because a woman has made him the most important sacrifices, will deny her the courtesy and attention which should always be the privilege of the weaker sex. A man, however, may cloak a woman when she is cold, or offer her his arm when she is weary, and yet be removed,—so far as his spirit is concerned, —thousands of miles from the recipient of these formal civilities.

The 'flame' of Anthony Hepburn's boyish

heart was utterly uncongenial to him at the period of his awakened experience. He had realized this sooner, perhaps, than most men would have realized it, and he had become embittered by the disappointment which such a consciousness had brought with it.

Some of this bitterness and disappointment (as must needs happen when such sentiments have once been called into existence) had reacted upon the being who unconsciously inspired them, so that he had had to endure his full share of passionate reproaches, regretful comparisons, and unprofitable repining.

The contrast which is nearly always apparent between a man's demeanour during the hopeful, or expectant, period, and that which he is wont to assume after all hopes and expectations have been fulfilled, must have sent a death-chill to many a tender heart, even where there exists a secret consciousness of dormant affection; and women are prone to speak about their grievances to those they love.

Where the heart is not tender enough to feel, the vanity is often all the more sensitive, and the woman who has been accustomed to command will not be likely to endure the loss of her sovereignty with equanimity.

'And has it come to this? . . . the suppliant rules!'*

she will say to herself, although, perhaps, in other words; and that a suppliant should come to rule at all, however benignly, must always seem to her an injustice and an incongruity.

The man, therefore, who has 'loved out,' rapidly and irrevocably, an unwise and an unlawful love, and who has grown thoroughly weary of the woman who inspired it, cannot expect, thenceforward, to derive much enjoyment from her society; and, of late years, Anthony Hepburn's brief visits to 'The Aspens,' had been distasteful enough to him to seem to partake of the nature of a penance, which merited almost to be turned 'to the use of edifying.'

Mrs. Van Buren, although her complaints may not seem to be deserving of much sympathy, had certainly some grounds for discontent. Colonel Hepburn, whilst denying her no luxury or comfort which could minister to her personal well-being, appeared, almost, by the coldness and formality of his manner, as though he were punishing her now for the favours which she had bestowed upon him at, perhaps, the only period of his existence when he could have appreciated them.

* Earl of Rosslyn.

Looked at from a woman's point of view, there would seem, naturally, to be something of injustice in this. Just, or unjust,—

> 'What breath shall fire and re-inspire
> A dead desire?'

And herein lay Mrs. Van Buren's real grievance. Whenever he found himself in her company, Anthony Hepburn was 'lord of himself' to a degree which seemed to her to fall little short of being insulting. Upon *him*, she had become utterly dependent, even for her daily bread. From *her*, he neither desired nor demanded anything. He was her lover no longer, and yet, more than ever her master, and the advantage of his position over her own could not fail to wound and gall her. It was no doubt intended by Nature, that, even where real affection exists between two persons of different sexes, the man should seem to rule and be strong, whilst the woman obeys and is weak. But I have often wondered—being a woman myself, and so taking, probably, the narrow feminine view in such matters—why a man, who can be so truly great, both by reason of his better brain and because of his more vigorous physical strength—whenever he chooses to display it—should so flaunt his power

and glory before the eyes of his female slave, who, once she has become his slave *indeed*, is about the most helpless and vulnerable of God's creatures?

I should have thought, on the contrary (looking still through my narrow woman's eye), that the really strong man, in the presence of a being so miserably feeble, would, out of common humanity, make no sort of display of his superiority; just as a modest rich man might hesitate about pouring forth all his wealth before a beggar. It seems to me that, if he felt benevolently disposed towards the beggar, and yet, could not altogether satisfy his needs, he would, at any rate, dissemble his great riches for the time being, or even simulate a kindred poverty in *something*—for there are ways in which we are all of us poor—and so set the mendicant more at his ease, without affecting much the contents of his own money-bags.

Rich men, however, are often rather purse-proud than generous, and although Dives may not have fed Lazarus with anything very sustaining, he was, no doubt, pleased that the beggar should see how sumptuously he dined.

Anthony Hepburn had as little of the ostentatious tyrant in his disposition as was consistent

with his manhood. Without, however, making any conscious display of his strength, he appeared to Mrs. Van Buren to be painfully exempt from most human weaknesses. Her tears, threats, and supplications, were wasted upon one who endured them less like a man than like a statue of stone. They elicited no flow of tender or consoling words, no generous vintages were poured forth from the hidden cellars of his being to make glad her heart! She was powerless, now, either to influence or to move him, and sought in vain in the depths of his grey eyes, for a ray of the sacred fire which had inspired them once. In the presence of his former mistress, he was strong, impassive, and self-controlled. He was glad that it was so, and she knew that he was both strong and glad—because of his strength.

But now, to this woman, smarting under a sense of anger and humiliation, a man had appeared who seemed to be as free from all Anthony Hepburn's shortcomings as he was deficient, in reality, in his nobler qualities. Young, handsome, eloquent, and pre-eminently un-statuesque, Falconborough was the very person to console a woman who was, or conceived herself to be, the victim of neglect. The interest and admiration

with which he regarded her, had evidently been mutual from the first. He thought her beautiful, whilst she imagined that he was sympathetic. He believed her to be rich, and she believed him to be noble. In these circumstances, it was not wonderful that their friendship should have advanced with gigantic strides.

In common with most women who have not mingled much in intellectual circles, Mrs. Van Buren was disposed to converse about *people* rather than things, and the person in whom she could take the most sympathetic interest was the 'first person singular.' Whenever she enlarged upon the hopes, disappointments, and tribulations of this particular person, she found herself thoroughly at home; and Falconborough, who had just entered upon the hopeful and expectant period, was only too glad to listen, in the intervals between a good many similar reminiscences of his own. The name of Anthony Hepburn very naturally cropped up in the course of these confidential conversations; but Mrs. Van Buren's *amour propre* had not permitted her to describe the facts of the case precisely as they were.

After listening to her account of the matter, Falconborough had come to regard Anthony Hep-

burn in the light of an ardent and importunate suitor, who had long pursued her with his unlawful attentions, and who, over and over again repulsed, had returned over and over again to the charge. The old Indian photographs—one of them faded now to a pale mustard-colour—went, certainly, some way towards confirming this impression, and whenever he happened to find himself alone in the smaller sitting-room at 'The Aspens,' Falconborough returned to the contemplation of them with malicious satisfaction.

Alas! what memories they may awaken, those old mustard-coloured photographs, which owe their existence to the rays of suns that have for ever set! and how they may mislead and torture, when they appear before us like spectres, tricked out in their old-fashioned garments of the past!

Of the three Indian photographs, Falconborough preferred the one which represented Mrs. Van Buren on horseback. It gratified him to observe Anthony Hepburn's slavish and obsequious attitude as he stooped down to adjust the stirrup-leather. Supposing that he could wrest from this man, who had defied him, the affection of this woman, whom it appeared evident that he loved, would there not be good reason for him to

triumph? And when, in addition to this, the woman in question was rich, handsome, and seemingly not averse to respond to his advances? Must not such a situation seem, to a susceptible and revengeful nature, to be fraught with the keenest possible dramatic interest?

At the commencement of Falconborough's connexion with Mr. Podmore, it had merely been his intention to obtain some sort of lucrative employment for a time, and to amuse himself—whenever he happened to have the opportunity—by flirting with his new patron's good-looking neighbour. He had determined that the '*pour-parlers*' relative to Mrs. Van Buren's evacuation of 'The Aspens,' should not be brought to a conclusion until he had grown weary of them himself, and he had devised complications which would have the effect of detaining her at Clapham whether Mr. Podmore desired it or no. But, as his keenness for the adventure had become intensified by the mingling of warmer and fiercer emotions, he had felt impelled to change his tactics altogether.

He was impatient, now, for Mrs. Van Buren to remove from her present abode to take up her residence in London, where the frequency of his

visits would not be observed and commented upon by Mr. Podmore; and all his persuasive eloquence began to be directed towards the furtherance of this project, which did not seem to be at all distasteful to the lady herself.

He commenced by expressing his surprise that any woman, possessed of so many attractions, should consent to bury herself alive within, actually, walking distance of the most brilliant society in the world; and he then proceeded to lay great stress upon the probably unhealthy condition of 'The Aspens,' which condition, he was enabled to state upon authority, Mr. Podmore had no intention of remedying at present. All seemed to be combining satisfactorily towards the conclusion he desired, when, with the news of Mr. Van Buren's death, Mr. Podmore's intentions unexpectedly underwent a provoking change.

The reasons that he gave for thus departing from his original plan, appeared to Falconborough to be somewhat shadowy and unsubstantial, and he at once suspected the existence, in Mr. Podmore's breast, of motives which he was unwilling to avow.

Money-complications, Falconborough came to the conclusion, lay, most likely, at the root of the

matter. Mr. Podmore had, perhaps, found out that he was unable, just yet, to set about the demolitions and additions which were to transform 'The Aspens' into an estate worth three times its present value, and he desired, probably, to retain Mrs. Van Buren as a tenant until he saw his way to making these expensive improvements. He had been a little too hasty, he averred, in his estimate of the lady's character and position. She had possessed a real husband, at any rate, who seemed, from an account which Mr. Podmore had seen reproduced from an Indian newspaper, to have been rather a distinguished person. Added to the ample pay of an Anglo-Indian official, he had, possibly, a private fortune of his own, and this would account for the luxurious manner in which his wife and child had been enabled to live in England,—for the early peas, forced asparagus, and barrels of native oysters. The 'separation' had, very likely, been merely an amicable affair of climate, for it seemed to be an almost invariable rule that, when the climate of India proved congenial to a husband, it disagreed seriously with the wife; and the fashionably dressed young men who had driven down from London in hansom-cabs, were, in all probability,

Mrs. Van Buren's brothers. Perhaps, now that she had lost her husband, and gone into such very respectable mourning, she might not play and sing quite so loudly as before her bereavement. And, perhaps, again, the change which had taken place in her circumstances might necessitate her leaving 'The Aspens' of her own accord.

Anyhow, Mr. Podmore did not see any particular reason (he declared) why she should be, as it were, almost forcibly ejected.

His matrimonial projects, too, Falconborough could not help perceiving, seemed to have undergone several important modifications. Had Mr. Podmore ever really nourished any such projects at all? the reader may be tempted to inquire.

When, some six or seven years ago, he had first made the acquaintance of Miss Elizabeth Barlow, and had beheld her great-niece, Miss Lucy, — seated, hemming dusters, under the gnarled medlar-tree in the back-garden,—it may, perhaps, have occurred to him that, as it is not good for man to live alone, he would probably find himself, one day, on the look-out for a helpmate, and that this sort of pretty, meek, duster-hemming kind of wife, was just the one that would be best suited to his need. Or, it may

have been, that,—as he was possessed of a somewhat 'fussy' and officious nature,—and delighted in occupying himself with other people's affairs, and in being looked up to as a sort of benevolent Providence,—he may have found the house of Miss Elizabeth Barlow (who had fully ministered to his vanity in this respect) a pleasant one to frequent,—and in order to furnish himself with a plausible excuse for so doing, he may have hinted at these shadowy matrimonial projects in the dim future;—or he may even have advanced them from other and more unworthy motives,—with a view of obtaining possession of some of Miss Elizabeth's savings in order to invest them in shady and hazardous speculations.

Perhaps, however, this apparent change in his plans was occasioned by the changes which had taken place in Lucy herself.

Instead of the meek and subservient 'childie' of the old time,—in her simple morning dress and flowery lawn-tennis aprons, the gaping pockets of which (seeing that lawn-tennis had never become established at Barlow Lodge) were filled with tapes, bobbins, and buttons, instead of with India-rubber balls,—Mr. Podmore was now confronted,—whenever he called at Miss Eliza-

beth's residence,—with what may have appeared to him to be a languid and fashionably-dressed young lady, who treated him with coldness, not to say haughtiness, and who seemed to have entirely given over the hemming of dusters.

The old Frenchman's indiscreet revelations, following, as they did, upon a natural repulsion, had, indeed, rendered Mr. Podmore altogether odious in Lucy's sight. She regarded him as a being to be classed with those 'men-slugs and human serpentry' to which the *Quarterly Reviewers* took exception in John Keats' *Endymion*, and with the view of averting, if possible, his dreaded proposal of marriage, she had been at no pains to conceal her feelings.

Between himself and this haughty and supercilious beauty, Mr. Podmore may have perceived that there existed no sympathy whatsoever. Miss Elizabeth had refrained from questioning him, of late, as to his matrimonial views. Perhaps *she*, too, would have desired that this matter should end by dying a natural death, and Mr. Podmore, perhaps, saw no reason why he should return to the subject uninvited. Supposing that he had, indeed, irrevocably changed his mind, he might find himself compelled, no doubt, to give some

plausible excuse in explanation of his seeming fickleness,—if Miss Elizabeth Barlow chose to live on very long after the usually allotted time. . . . If, however, she departed this life within a reasonable period, he would be spared even this ingenious effort of the imagination.

Thus it happened, then, that, just as Falconborough was congratulating himself upon having carried out successfully his own, as well as his patron's wishes, Mr. Podmore came to the conclusion that it would be of more advantage to his interests for Mrs. Van Buren to continue his tenant. It was, as yet, too early in the day for the young adventurer to act in open opposition to received instructions,—but with the assistance of the lady herself, he was enabled to fall back upon what seemed to him to be a very satisfactory compromise.

Mrs. Van Buren decided, after a good deal of vacillation, to go down to Brighton for about a fortnight or three weeks, for change of air; and, at about the same time, Falconborough, also, after mentioning to Mr. Podmore that a near relative of his own was lying dangerously ill 'in Sussex,' took his way to the same fashionable watering-place.

Acting upon the suggestion of her new admirer, Mrs. Van Buren did not take her child with her to the seaside. She left little Lily at 'The Aspens,' under the charge of her own maid, and making the most of this act of apparent unselfishness, started off alone, with an agreeable sense of freedom and of emancipation from maternal cares.

Notwithstanding that 'his lordship' had begged her, from the first, to make no mention of his name to Anthony Hepburn (the cousin, between whom and himself there existed,—as he had informed her,—a most unfortunate family-feud),—it was not altogether impossible that, by a mere accident, these two men might one day clash, and the notion of this contingency,—unpleasant of contemplation as it was to Falconborough,—did not seem to be at all disagreeable to Mrs. Van Buren herself. She had had good reasons, perhaps, for taking a somewhat cynical view of human affection, and shared Monsieur de la Vieilleroche's theory,—to the effect that the love of man is often stimulated by a sense of insecurity, or a dread of loss.

Who could say whether, upon discovering that she had captivated this handsome young

nobleman, Anthony Hepburn might not be piqued into returning to his old allegiance? Judging by the behaviour of other men she had known, she felt that this was not altogether impossible. The effect which had been produced upon Falconborough by her confidences as to his 'cousin's' devotion had not escaped her notice. Might not Anthony be influenced somewhat after the same fashion, if rumours of 'Lord' Falconborough's attentions were to reach his ears? . . .

Animated by some such ideas as these, and overjoyed to escape from the dull monotony of her suburban home,—Mrs. Van Buren quitted 'The Aspens' a few days previous to Lucy's return from the North, and proceeded to Brighton, *viâ* Clapham Junction, in order to join her new admirer and 'play with fire.'

CHAPTER XIV.

About this time there came to Lucy a communication from the outer world, in the form of a letter from her cousin Adeliza, and as it contained a good deal of sound worldly wisdom, together with an interesting piece of family news, I venture to transcribe it in full:—

'My dearest Lucy,' wrote Miss Binks; 'since I last wrote, I have not had one single moment to spare, otherwise I should have tried to make another assignation with you, so as to have ensured a meeting. But it is impossible, with all our numerous engagements, to be sure of what a day may bring forth, and so I have never been able to fix upon a time; and as all my intelligence is sloughed away in replying to invitations, I naturally avoid writing more letters than I can help. But, besides all this, there is the everlasting question of *dress*. Putting on, taking off, fitting,

altering, letting out and taking in, and buying bonnets and hats that go with one's gowns. Then, just at the very last moment, when one fancies one is rigged out becomingly for a ball or a garden-party, ten to one if you don't find that your fan or parasol is of the wrong colour, or that your best open-work stockings have run into "ladders," or that your long gloves have all *gone off to the cleaners!* Why not dress in a more simple way, you will say, for living where you do, you can go on, no doubt, through nearly the whole of the summer with only a couple of frocks. In London, however, you have no idea of the competition, and whilst one is upon approbation, one is obliged to make every possible effort to please. Besides which, one is really *bound*, for the honour of one's *order*, to try and cut out those horrid, flirting married women (chiefly Americans), who spend whole fortunes upon their clothes, and who, not content with having captured ugly but eligible husbands, endeavour to take away all the best-looking and most agreeable men from us poor girls! However, I won't say another word against married women, for, I must tell you, I am about to become one of them *myself!* Yes, my dear Lucy, Charlie Sparshott has, at last, come to what

Algy *will* speak of as "the scratch," and, I do assure you, I feel just like a battered vessel that has got into port. I must relate how it all came about, even at the risk of wearying you :—When first we came up to Town (after that dreadful journey in the train, when Guffy tried so very hard to destroy my prospects), I must say I felt *anything but sure of him!*

'He is one of those people, I am happy to know (for I discover new virtues in him *every day*), who are too *honest*, and too *gentlemanlike*, to plunge into a flirtation unless they actually mean "business," and, at that time, he had evidently not quite made up his mind.

'I was careful, however, to tell him our London address, which I not only repeated several times, but wrote down for him on the back of an envelope, for I know what dreadful memories young men generally have, particularly during the Season. I never heard or saw anything of him, however, until well into the month of May, and, as nobody else better had turned up in the meantime, I really felt upon the very *brink of despair*, and was beginning to turn quite serious and religious. The dear boy, however, had not forgotten me, for, one Saturday, upon return-

ing from paying some visits with Mama, what should I see but his beloved card upon the hall table!

'But, as he had called just at the very time when I had told him we were *perfectly certain* to be out—viz., between half-past three and half-past four, I did not feel *altogether encouraged!* The season for cotton-gowns and washing-silks had now arrived, in which, I always think, one looks awfully well in the morning, and so, upon the following Monday, I asked Algy if he would take me into the Park at half-past twelve, and as, although he is selfish in most things, like all boys, he is very good-natured about going with one to places where he is amused himself, he at once consented. We treated ourselves to chairs and sat down under a tree and watched the people who passed riding and walking. I can't say that I much expected to see Captain Sparshott, knowing that his regiment is not quartered in London; being *Monday*, however, it was just possible that he might have come up on *Saturday* to have his hair cut (as Algy says officers quartered near London constantly do), and remained over the Sunday; I had, therefore, just a ray of hope. As all this was passing in my mind, I looked

down the path, and saw him looming in the distance, walking with a friend, looking *most delicious* (although not in uniform), and with a beautiful red carnation in his button-hole.

'I looked hard at him, in order to attract his attention, and was certainly under the impression that he saw me, and I should have fancied, if I had never seen him again, for him to explain, that he meant to avoid us, for he suddenly darted across the walk, dragging his friend through the row of chairs where there was no natural opening, and continued his way behind us, down the back path. As I don't suppose you have ever been really in love, you will be *quite unable* to imagine my feelings!' ('As I have never been really in love!' Lucy could not help repeating, audibly, as she read these words.)

'It turned out, however, that I was quite wrong.

'Captain Sparshott had not seen us; being (what I had never found out before) tremendously near-sighted. I felt, in a few minutes, that he was passing behind me, by a sort of electric thrill which ran all down the back of my dress, but had not the courage to turn round at once, and when I did so, he had got very nearly

as far as Hyde Park Corner. I was, of course, in *a state of utter despair*, but kept my eye upon him all the same, and saw him part with his friend, and then turn back and come towards us, keeping, as before, to the path which goes down behind the first row of seats. But, by this time, I had settled upon *a plan of action*. When he reached the place where we were sitting, I suddenly started up, pretending that I fancied there was something wrong with the leg of my chair, and by this means dear Charlie and I were brought face to face. Finding that escape was impossible, he drew up an iron chair from the back row, and sat down.

'We plunged at once into conversation, I doing all in my power to flatter and encourage him, when, by-and-by, what does that miserable Algy take it into his head to do, but invite him to luncheon, in a sort of generous, hearty manner, as if we were accustomed to keep *open house!*

'I positively shuddered when Captain Sparshott, who had at first refused, yielded to Algy's importunity, and accepted, for it was not Mama's day for asking people to luncheon, and besides, being *Monday*, when there is always only cold beef and pickled walnuts, I remembered that

Upjohn had asked permission to go to his father's funeral (his father has had a funeral already, at least *twice* before), so that the door-bell would have to be answered by *a maid*, which always looks so disgusting!

'As it happened, however, everything turned out for the best,—dear Charlie declaring that (*next to me*) cold beef was the one thing he preferred,—(which was pretty strong, I thought, for a first visit, particularly as being, as he said, "rather chippy," he had only drank a pint of Apollinaris water!) When men tell one that they are "chippy," one naturally feels that they have been *gambling*, or plunging into all kinds of *horrible dissipations*, so it was quite a relief to me when he explained that he had attended a very long military banquet upon Saturday night, having come up to London for the express purpose, where there had been a good deal of *gas* in the room, which always upsets him; and sure enough, upon looking through the *Court Journal* upon the following Saturday, I saw that he had dined at the Annual Regimental Dinner of the 18th Lancers, which had taken place at Willis's Rooms. One finds men out so often in terrible falsehoods and prevarications, that it was a de-

lightful surprise to me to discover that Captain Sparshott had spoken the *exact truth!*

'Mama, who was a little taken a-back at first, at our having so unexpectedly brought home Charlie to luncheon, did not put in an appearance until after that repast, when she came down looking quite beaming and cordial, for which I felt, of course, everlastingly grateful. She invited him to dinner, naming the following Tuesday week, but, upon that day, he was, unfortunately, already engaged. Mama, then, to my great astonishment and delight, asked him to name his own day, and, after a good deal of reflection, he ended by selecting *that day month*,—Tuesday, the 23rd of June. It was rather a disappointment to me that he should have fixed upon such a distant day, because one felt that before it dawned, an earthquake might have swallowed us all up, or that one might have been driven, out of *sheer desperation*, to take up with somebody else. There was nothing for it but to wait, however; for, as Mama has had to give up going this year to Hampton Court, on account of the lending of apartments being abolished by the Government, my only chance of a meeting with Charlie was in London.

'Well, my dear Lucy, the happy day came at last. As you can fancy, I was in a great state of trepidation about the dinner. Algy, who is very sharp about such matters, as he hears what men say to each other after the ladies have gone upstairs, fancied that Captain Sparshott only drank Apollinaris water that day at luncheon, because he mistrusted the wine, and had pretended that he was "chippy" in order to *save our feelings*, for, it seems, after I had left the room, he poured out a large glass of Mama's favourite brown sherry, which he did not seem much to care for, and *left*, and which Algy confesses he considers a little "treacly," though this did not prevent him from finishing it up afterwards, whilst Charlie and I were talking in the back drawing-room. I made up my mind, therefore, to try and induce Mama, who, as you know, is terribly economical, to get in some *really good dry champagne*, for Algy declares that he has heard men say that *sweet* champagne, which is certainly much the *nicest*, sows the seeds of *gout*, and all sorts of horrible diseases, though he says he has never found out that it disagreed with him much *himself*. I was in a terrible state of mind, too, about the *cooking*, for our own cook, although a most respectable middle-aged woman,

who was once married to a policeman who ill-treated her, and left her very nearly destitute, and who is not at all a bad hand at *fried soles*, or a *joint*, is fearfully uncertain with regard to her *soups* and *entrées*, and decidedly heavy-handed with her *seasoning*.

'At first, I thought of trying to persuade Mama to have in a *most excellent French man-cook* we know of, who had once lived with a member of the *Royal Family*, but who can now be had very cheap, having taken to drinking, in consequence of the failure of a *Building Society* in which he had invested his savings. But I ended by abandoning the idea, having heard that one could never be quite sure of him, and feeling that, at such a moment, any catastrophe might "*do*" *for one's whole future!* As, however, Gunter's (the Motcomb Street establishment) is so very near, it occurred to me that we might get in some *Julienne* soup and two nice little *made dishes*, also some cream and lemon-water ices; and I proposed this to Mama, although rather with fear and trembling. To my great joy, however, Mama rose to the notion like a trout at a fly, and Guffy was sent round at once to enter into negotiations and bargain with the

confectioner. After a good deal of going backwards and forwards, Mama and Gunter at last came to terms, Mama having said that she did not mind the *crême de volaille* being partly made up of *rabbit*, and that she preferred tinned peas to fresh ones with the lamb-cutlets.

'Still, although everything seemed to be going on so smoothly, I was dreadfully nervous by the time I went up to dress for dinner. . . . But I shall only weary you, my dear Lucy, by entering into all these minute details. Suffice it to say, that the dinner went off very well indeed, though Mama was much vexed to see that, after all our efforts, Captain Sparshott only partook of the *fried soles* and the *joint;* for, of course, she had not gone to the expense of delicious *entrées*, and cream, and lemon-water ices, to see them all gobbled up by Algy, which was what actually came to pass! The *champagne*, however, which was got from a place under the Pantechnicon, was pronounced *excellent* by everybody. Mama had had in *six bottles*, having come to an understanding with the wine-merchant that those which were *not opened* were to be taken back; but, to her surprise, Upjohn declared that they had been *all finished*, which, I dare say, might

have annoyed her, if dear Charlie had gone away without *expressing his feelings!* . . . When one has been, *or fancied* one's self, in love as often as *I* have, and all to no purpose, I can't say what a satisfaction it is when one gets, at last, a *real, genuine proposal!* . . . It took place upon the green velvet sofa in the back drawing-room, and to my dying day, I shall ever look upon that spot as sacred ground! . . . Mama had invited three old friends of her own, who were fond of *whist*, and a young Scotch lady, who can sing old Irish melodies, but who always prefers that people should *talk* whilst she is singing, as, otherwise, she feels so horribly nervous. At first the elders all sat together and talked about their *complaints* and the high prices of everything, whilst Algy sat by the piano, and encouraged our other guest to "give tongue," as he calls it, alluding, of course, to her *singing. Then,* in the back drawing-room, on the sofa, as I told you, *it happened at last,* for the first time in my life, I confess, with humiliation; and one felt all the blood positively tingling in one's veins with triumph and delight, and the feeling of how pleased Mama would be to get me off her hands! . . . I cannot tell you what a change

the whole thing has made in me, or how differently I look upon Captain Sparshott since he has actually *come to the point!* To write about being in love to a person who has never been in that delightful state, is like speaking of colour to a blind man, so, my dear Lucy, I will not weary you with a *description of my feelings!* When your own time comes, as no doubt it will some day, you may be, perhaps, better able to understand! But, although I have been writing all this time, I have not yet arrived at the *gist* of my letter, which was written at *Mama's request*, in order to say that on Monday, the 6th of July (this day week), we are going to have another dinner-party here, of the *same character*, and that we hope so much that you will give us the pleasure of your company at *a quarter to eight o'clock.* Upon that evening we propose entertaining Sir Timothy and Lady Sparshott, dearest Charlie's father and mother; but I shall not be unmindful of *your* interests, and so that you should not be bored by looking on at our *billing and cooing* (for, of course, Captain Sparshott will be dining here too), I shall get Mama, if you agree to come, to invite one of *your most devoted admirers* to talk to *you!*

'I dare say you wondered, the other day when we left cards, why we didn't come in and see you—for I might then have told you all this, instead of writing you such an enormously long letter—but the fact is, Mama and I were on our way to Wimbledon, to call upon dear Charlie's parents, who have taken a house there for the summer, and wishing, naturally, to make *a favourable impression*, I was afraid of getting in and out of the brougham for fear of tumbling my dress!

'And so, my dear Lucy, I shall soon bid farewell to my hated *bachelor-state;* and I can assure you I am not sorry for it! . . . I shall not have time upon the evening of the 6th to give you the result of all my London experience, but am determined to pass it on to you one of these days, for I am sure that girls often miss very good chances of getting settled in life more from "*greenness*" and *stupidity* than from *positive vice!* As for *men*, it takes one *at least three seasons* to find them out; and, even then, so wicked are they, and so deceitful (of course I am not including Captain Sparshott, who has behaved, always, in the *most gentlemanlike way*), that one can only know them *by halves!* I should say

the kind of man to be most mistrusted, in a general way, by a girl beginning a London life (particularly if one's mother, like *mine*, is an invalid, and one's brother, like Algy, so young and so greedy that he is always thinking of *the refreshments* at balls and breakfasts, and never looks after one at all) is the tall, good-looking, dyed, and "done-up," *middle-aged, married man*, with the plain wife (married, of course, for her money), and the large and hideous family (all taking after the *mother's side*), whose two objects in life seem to be, to keep his waist, and to make fools of all the pretty girls who are inclined to flirt with him. He misleads one at first by his paternal manner, introducing one to his eldest daughter, who is usually quite as old as one is one's self, but *a perfect noodle*, and by sending one tickets for cheapish entertainments, to which he offers to escort one, with his daughter, preferring, generally, *night* things, or places where there are *bushes* and *summer-houses*, such as *Fêtes at the Botanical Gardens*, fireworks at *the Crystal Palace*, &c. Here, the first thing he always does is, to manage to lose his daughter, and then gives one his arm and sets off to pretend to look for her in all sorts of out-of-the-way *corners* and *conserva-*

tories, talking, all the time, the most absurd nonsense *for a man of his age;* or trying to kiss one, if one happens to be at the Crystal Palace, in the seclusion of the *Pompeian Court*, or down by the artificial lake, amongst the *extinct animals!* . . . Then, when this kind of thing has gone on for some time, and *other people*, who might have had more honourable intentions, have been *kept off*, his poor, long-suffering, bruised reed of a wife becomes jealous, and goes about vituperating one right and left, *behind one's back*, until there is *nothing awful* that she hasn't said of one, although one would not have been married to her husband for all the *untold wealth* in the world! This sort of man is very easily found out if one is only *wide awake;* and he sheers off, as soon as he is unmasked, in search of *some more confiding victim*, after begging one not to be such a "little fool" as to tell one's mother of his goings on, and make mischief! . . .

'But I have just remembered another kind of man, who is even more dangerous than this one, and who is, of all others, to be avoided, for I will not count the good-looking younger son, with *nothing*,—who is afraid to propose because he knows he will be refused,—or the tremendously

rich *out-and-out "swell,"*—who is afraid to do so because he is certain of being accepted, and who puts off asking any one to marry him until he is nearly eighty years old, and wishes to spite his nephews! . . . The man I mean, my dearest Lucy,—and I beg you will pay attention to my words,—is the man who is *secretly but irrevocably* tied up with somebody that *nobody knows anything about!* . . . As he is seldom allowed to dine out, or go to parties, he has plenty of time to cultivate his mind, and he enjoys his liberty awfully whenever he is able to get it,—and yet,—behind a kind of "bird-escaped-from-the-cage" manner, which prevents him from seeming *absent* or *inattentive,*—there is something melancholy and resigned about him, which is,—I must say,—*dreadfully attractive!* . . . He surprises one by knowing all about one's *dresses,* and one's *ways,*—for the *mysterious object of his affections* has taken care to grind *all the selfishness out of him,* and taught him *exactly how to please women.* Feeling that he is known not to be *a marrying man,* he is *perfectly at his ease,* and not at all afraid of *committing himself,* and so, he strikes one,—at once,—as being *utterly and entirely* different from everybody else! But, *believe me,* my dear Lucy, he is

not of the slightest *real good* to us girls; and, since my engagement to dearest Charlie, I feel so benevolently disposed towards *my whole sex*, that I can't help giving you these few hints *for your future guidance!* . . . As my engagement is not yet announced, I have not received any *wedding-presents*, but expect, as soon as it appears in the *Morning Post*, that they will come pouring in!

'How I wish that, without giving offence to common decency, I could publicly proclaim that I should very much prefer *really valuable jewelry*, to trumpery *or-molu*, stuck all over with *sham onyxes*, and that no author need present me with his, (or *her*,) works, however beautifully they may be bound! . . . I must conclude, my dear Lucy, by hoping that *your own time* may not be long in coming, and that you will be as fortunate as *I* have been in your choice! . . .

'And now, good-bye, *at last*, and with my kind remembrances to your great-aunt, (Oh, Lucy, how *perfectly appalling* to have arrived at her age, and still to be an old maid!)

'Believe me to be

'Your very affectionate Cousin,

'ADELIZA BINKS.'

'*One of your most devoted admirers?*' Lucy repeated to herself when she had finished reading this long letter.

Was it possible that Adeliza, brimming over with benevolence because of the happy change in her own circumstances, could actually contemplate inviting . . .?

After all, there was nothing *so very* preposterous in the notion! . . . Had not Adeliza and her brother been cordially welcomed at Falconborough Park? . . . Was not Captain Sparshott a brother officer? . . . Who could say what such a meeting might not bring forth, however formal and constrained it needs must be, in the presence of company? . . . Adeliza, however, had alluded in her letter, to a green velvet sofa in the back drawing-room, upon which Captain Sparshott, at any rate, had contrived to make a proposal of marriage unheard. Might not Colonel Hepburn, also, find an opportunity for saying a few kind words in this same secluded spot, particularly if the nervous young Scotch lady happened to have been likewise invited, and could only be induced to sing one of her old Irish melodies just at the right moment! . . .

The bare hope, even, that she might be about

to see Anthony Hepburn again, came to Lucy like a breath of new life; and, after acquainting her great-aunt with the contents of the letter, she sat down and replied to it at once, warmly congratulating her cousin upon her engagement, and expressing the great pleasure she would have in availing herself of her kind invitation to dinner on Monday the 6th of July.

CHAPTER XV.

I WONDER, now, not nearly so much as I once wondered, at the extreme rarity of the infatuation we call 'Love' when it is in its highest state of perfection. I am, on the contrary, surprised, considering the number of ingredients that go to compose it, and the years, with their memories, their joys, and their sorrows, which must aid in the maturing of them, that it should not be even a still greater rarity than it is; and I am not astonished, either, that those persons who have had no taste of it themselves, should disbelieve altogether in its existence.

For, like all the very best and most precious of earthly things, the perfectly harmonious union of two beings of utterly different natures must, of necessity, be uncommon.

Think of how much is required, independent of all individual action or design, to bring it about in the first instance! . . . It is not enough,

though this is one step to the good, certainly, to have been created with a heart capable of the warmest and tenderest emotions. How many beings secretly thus dowered, have passed, unblest through the barren spring and summer of their lives to the time of withering and whitening, when even Hope must perish! Nay, not all of them have endured to this desolate season. Many have fainted and fallen by the way. They are shut off from their fellows by the bars of a madhouse, or the grey river crawls over them and their vanished dreams, or they have so turned aside from their better impulses that they are as much lost to life as the maniac or the suicide.

No; this first step to the good, the sensibility to emotion, is not quite enough, at any rate *for a woman.*

She of the tender heart must meet with her predestined counterpart, and he must be set up where she will know him for what he is. Ages, tastes, the accidents of appearance and position, should in some sort coincide, and even, I think, for the better chances of a perfect understanding, the accident of *nationality*, although love is not to be shackled and restrained by such trifles as oceans, mountain-ranges, or other geographical demarcations.

Still, it is better that the two people who decide upon becoming, if possible, *one*, should begin by belonging to the same country, because from the differences and disagreements which will probably arise between them in the future, howsoever well they may be mated, a goodly number, at least, having to do with creeds and customs of private living, down to the very manner in which they bake, break, and eat, their daily bread, will in such cases, be excluded, and it is something, at any rate, to be enabled to make a fair beginning.

But yet, should external circumstances combine favourably, something, too, is required of individual action and design, though these will achieve nothing of themselves.

There must be courage, constancy, forbearance. Courage to withstand, unmoved, the chorus of cruel and cavilling voices, crying aloud that all men are false, that no woman is steadfast, that crowned love will assuredly perish. Constancy of heart, not only in the resisting of what may prove to be a temptation when it has been too closely approached, but in the striving, for loyalty's sake, by no inducement thus closely to approach it; and besides this constancy and concentration of heart, there must be constancy and concentration of purpose. Then, forbearance—on

the part of both, but chiefly, because he is so much the stronger, on the part of the man, particularly when he has to do with a certain sort of romantic, idealizing, woman, who is not able to love entirely without pouring forth her whole substance in oblation, and who stands, thenceforward, helpless and bare in the presence of her master, discovered, conquered, and despoiled, with no new gift either to give or to withhold.

There is a passion, a voracity, and yet, a seeming hopelessness about the loving of this kind of woman, which is utterly unknown to her more placid and complacent sisters, and which is nearly always incomprehensible to its object. To be jealous, with a jealousy which seems to sap the very mainsprings of existence, and which reaches from the remotest past to the uttermost future, is an agony reserved for imaginative natures alone; and in matters connected with the emotions, women are generally much more imaginative and susceptible than men.

The hungry tigress crouched all ready to spring, will not be over nice as to the quality of her prey, and so, to a certain sort of material and impulsive woman, the present, with its tangible and available enjoyments, will be all sufficing. What need is there of questionings, of comparisons, of

torturing retrospections and anticipations? . . . What matter whether the idol of the moment be fashioned of gold, or of the commonest clay? Let us enjoy the hour and let it go! This is the sum-total of her philosophy.

And so, also, to the woman who is tender, trusting, *maternal*, almost, in her instincts, whose heart is unseared by those fiercer fires that consume, or by the memories that embitter—the present, with its sweet meed of requited affection will bring contentment enough.

'He has loved others,' (she may say to herself,) 'but so have not all men? . . . Others have loved him in return, and no wonder! . . . He has fallen; how sorely he must have been tempted! . . . He has sinned, but has he not also suffered? . . . He has deceived me,—perhaps,—but was he not hard pressed and encompassed? . . . I forgive him, and I am so glad to show him that I am able to forgive! . . . I have no wings that can carry me out from his presence into the perilous regions of fancy! . . . He is kind, he is well, he is here, and I am content!'

But to the woman whose longings are keen as is the hunger of the tigress, and who has lost all power either to conquer or ensnare; who can out-

love the mother in her tenderness and her devotion, and to whom it is yet given, to reflect, to imagine, and to remember, God and man seem to be alike unjust and unmerciful.

To her, indeed, Jealousy is 'cruel as the grave,' and the flame thereof 'most vehement,'—since it is her accursèd privilege to assist, and look on,—in fancy, at the very incidents which were the means of calling these sufferings into existence.

'So you are kind, I should not pause to ask
  Where, or with whom, you pass the envied hour
  That may not be for me; what honey'd flow'r
Allures you, or in whose warm smile you bask
  When I am absent! But, alas, a dow'r,
A fatal gift is mine, to lift the mask,
  And rend the veil, and so I have the pow'r
To read your fancy like an easy task.
I ask, yet need not ask; I see, I know,
  I feel, to all the sources of my being
The slightest secret shadow that may grow
  Across our path, till feeling, knowing, seeing,
Even your vanish'd Past, I sigh, "'Twas so
He kissed her!" though 'twere twenty years ago!'

Heaven help the poor woman whose love has thus recoiled upon her, and turned her into this miserable sort of snake-tormented seer! for when in such a mood, she passes trembling and faltering into the presence of the beloved, there is scarcely

one man in ten thousand who will aim at even the most rudimentary knowledge of what may be the inward and spiritual state which is productive of such unprofitable regrets!

It is the woman who sleeps well, and eats well, conducting herself rather more like a spectator than like an actor in the struggle, who generally receives from man his most devoted service, as seeming to him to be the embodiment of something pre-eminently tractable and feminine, and her placid temperament enables her to grow fat (like the queen-mother of the '*termites*,' or white ants) upon caresses.

It is she who triumphs, as a rule, over the poor slave of nerves and fancies; and when she has succeeded in ousting her, the comparison will always be favourable to the stolid usurper; for, considering the strength of man's physical and mental build, it is astonishing how little he can submit to in the way of restraint or disquietude, and notwithstanding that he is apparently enabled to fling aside his cares as easily as he can take off his hat.

So, then, there is forbearance needed, chiefly, as I have said, on the man's part; but self-control, too, on the part of this first sort of fanciful

woman, so that the wings of her imagination may not carry her too far afield; for though she can no more change her inward nature than she can change the colour of her eyes, the very weakest amongst us are able to dissemble—nay, dissimulation is especially the weapon of the weak—and, with the feigning of perfect contentment, it may be that contentment itself would come to her in the end.

For my own part,—so long as my bed was made and shared to my liking, I would much rather not possess the faculty of seeing further than the four posts of it, and I commend this sentiment to all imaginative married couples. Human nature, however, was made before bed-posts, and men in the flesh, and women in the spirit, have nearly always been incorrigible rovers!

But, ah, when all these pangs and anxieties have been endured and overcome, when all asperities and disparities are softened and reconciled by the soothing influences of time, how blessed is the state of those two faithful lovers who have clung together bravely to the end! Hand in hand, and heart to heart, they sit as though enthroned, up high over the heads of

other men, and seem to quaff the very nectar of the gods. Theirs is no tinsel crown, no cheaply-earned reward! What matter if his locks be scanty, or her tresses silvered? They are garlanded with budding myrtles, the time of their probation is over-past, and they can rest together in peacefulness and trust, and be content.

I had taken up my pen, meaning to proceed conscientiously with this story, after saying just a few words, at the beginning, having reference to love in the abstract. But the subject proving congenial, these few words have grown into a long and prosy dissertation; and Lucy Barlow and Adeliza Binks, with their military admirers, have been left standing precisely where they were before I sat myself down to write about them.

For this I shall endeavour to atone in the forthcoming chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW days after Lucy had received the letter from Adeliza which informed her of her engagement to Captain Sparshott, she took up the *Morning Post* in order to see if this interesting piece of intelligence had, as yet, been made public.

Glancing down the column upon which the fashionable news is recorded, she came suddenly upon a couple of familiar names—the formal announcement of an approaching marriage, *not*, however, the announcement she had expected.

As one in a dream she read on to the end of the paragraph, and then paused, dazed and stupid, like a person who has, unexpectedly, received a severe blow.

These were the printed words that had met her bewildered gaze:—'We understand that a marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Colonel Hepburn, 18th Lan-

cers, and Léonie, widow of Gustavus Van Buren, Esquire, of the Indian Civil Service.'

'Colonel Hepburn, Mrs. Van Buren!' Lucy repeated the two names in utter bewilderment, saying them over aloud for the better comprehension of their unnatural union.

The newspaper fell from her hand, and she remained staring vacantly at space. For some moments she could neither see nor hear, a cloud of agony seeming to shut her off from all consciousness of material existence. Then, by-and-by, her faculties returned as though oppressively intensified. The clock ticked louder and more monotonously than ever, whilst every object in the room seemed to stand out with painful distinctness.

'Colonel Hepburn, Mrs. Van Buren!' How terrible — how wonderful — how incomprehensible! The idol, raised by her unquestioning devotion upon so high a pedestal, and the woman who was not thought good enough by respectable Claphamites for their wives to visit! Between these two a marriage had been 'arranged,' and would 'shortly take place!'—What could it all mean? . . .

It was fortunate for Lucy, perhaps, that

whilst she was in this first state of bewilderment, and before she had come to realize the actual significance of the paragraph before her, she was forced by circumstances to control her emotion. Miss Elizabeth Barlow had ordered her bath-chair at eleven o'clock, and she expected her great-niece to accompany her whilst she took the morning air, and eleven was just upon the point of striking by the ticking timepiece.

As a rule the two ladies did not converse much upon the occasion of these morning airings, experiencing a certain sense of restraint in the presence of the chair-man. Lucy felt, therefore, that, by lagging a little behind, she would be enabled to ponder over this terrible piece of news at her leisure, for it seemed to her almost impossible to take it in all at once.

She put on her hat mechanically, settled her great-aunt in her bath-chair, and started the chair-man upon his monotonous course round Clapham Common.

Then, as she walked demurely behind, without visible semblance or show of emotion, she commenced wrestling with her misery under the modest shade of her white parasol, enduring, silently, the most acute mental agony.

She recalled, conscientiously, all the circumstances which had led to the gradual development of her love,—from the day of her first meeting with Anthony Hepburn in the railway-carriage. She perceived now, or fancied that she perceived, why he had entered the train at Clapham Junction, and why,—as was evident from the respectful inquiries of the 'Vet' relative to the weather in the Isle of Wight,—he must have previously inferred that he was absent upon a visit to Cowes instead of to 'The Aspens.' This discovery of what seemed like disingenuousness on the part of one, who, in spite of certain manly defects, had appeared to her to be possessed of great nobility of character, went like a sharp knife to Lucy's heart. Dissimulation, which I have just referred to as being especially the weapon of the weak, must always seem, to a woman, unworthy of man's stronger nature. Surely it is a little cowardly of him thus to invade her armoury and pick out her favourite weapon, when he has, at his disposal, so many nobler means of self-defence! So, since the 'Vet' would probably not have cared in the least where the Colonel had been staying, Lucy wished, now, that he had replied quite openly; 'I know nothing whatsoever about the weather at

Cowes, because I have been staying at Clapham.' Then, woman-like, as soon as she had arraigned him, and found him guilty, she set about pleading with herself in his behalf. Why, after all, might he not have stayed at Cowes previously to having visited 'The Aspens?' He had started, perhaps, from the Isle of Wight at an early hour upon that very morning, partaken of luncheon at Mrs. Van Buren's, and then visited the detachment of his regiment which was quartered at Hampton Court, travelling (most unfortunately) in the railway-carriage in which she,—Lucy Barlow,—was unsuspectingly taking her way. Because he had not, at once, blazoned forth to the world precisely where he had been, and because, at the very commencement of their accidental acquaintance, he had not confided to her the whole story of his past, there was no reason why she should imagine that he meant wilfully to deceive or betray. It was evident that he was, by nature, rather reserved than expansive; a man like Captain Sparshott might possibly have rattled out many of the details of his private life during a first railway-journey. Anthony Hepburn, however, was utterly and entirely different. Captain Sparshott and he were not to be mentioned in the same breath!

But still, in spite of Colonel Hepburn's habitual reserve, if she had not been more than usually blind, and deaf, and stupid, must she not have suspected, from the first, that he was involved in some sort of mysterious entanglement? Had he conducted himself, in the train, like a person who was eager to embark upon any new adventure or flirtation? No; he had, at first, taken no notice whatsoever of his fellow-passenger, but had calmly and quietly composed himself to sleep in his corner. Then it was, when his grey eyes seemed to be quite fast closed under their dark lashes, that she had ventured to allow her own to dwell timidly upon his face. He had suddenly looked up, and smiled,—which was only natural,—whilst she had looked down and blushed, which, after all, was only natural too. But then that foolish old woman had arrived upon the scene,—with the edible Chinese female dog with the male name,—and it was her persistence in the stupid blunder that she had made, which lay, in reality, at the root of all the mischief! Lucy's own blunder, however, had certainly had something to do with it as well. She had foolishly allowed herself to imagine, after her meeting with Adeliza, that Colonel Hepburn was the regimental 'Vet.' Sup-

posing, after having been courteous and respectful to him in the train, (when she had fancied that he must be, at least, a Prince,) she had become distant and haughty to him upon her arrival at Hampton Court, might he not have suspected that this change in her manner proceeded from her having discovered that he was only a Veterinary-Surgeon? and seeing that we are all of us fashioned out of the same sort of clay,—although there seems, certainly, to be a good deal of difference in the way in which it is kneaded into shape, —we ought always to be so particularly careful not to wound the susceptibilities of our so-called social inferiors! Perhaps, however, in thus striving to steer clear of any show of pride, she may have allowed the interest she felt in her new acquaintance to carry her a little too far in the opposite direction. Perhaps, when she had so unexpectedly found herself alone with him in the shadowy passage which looked into the tennis-court, she ought not to have permitted him to take her hand? This momentary contact had called into existence some sort of mysterious magnetic influence, which had reduced her, ever since, to the helpless condition of a slave! Then came the Boldero dance, bringing with it the dis-

covery that he was not a Veterinary-Surgeon after all. The revulsion of feeling occasioned by this intelligence must have totally confused and unnerved her for the time being, otherwise how could she possibly have been so imprudent as to wander forth, with almost a total stranger, into those shadowy, ghost-haunted corridors? How could she possibly have allowed . . . ? Oh, sacred and never-to-be-forgotten evening! Oh, balmy and delicious summer breezes! Oh, silvery moon! Oh, whispering fountain! and ye two stern Imperial Cæsars in your rounded niches! Ye were the silent witnesses of Lucy Barlow's initiation to the first soft mysteries of love!

But now; was this enchanting dream to end as suddenly as it had begun? Were all the romance, and excitement, and joy in living, to pass away from her?

In the library at Falconborough Park Colonel Hepburn had evidently striven to prepare her for what might one day happen.

'I am a coward,' he had said to her upon that memorable afternoon,—'a miserable coward;' and then, when she had taken his words literally, and expressed her surprise, he had explained that it was in *moral courage* that he had discovered him-

self to be deficient. 'Without displaying personal cowardice,' he had continued, 'a man may sometimes find himself in a position where a bold stroke would put an end to much that he feels to be both irksome and humiliating, and he may yet be wanting in the courage to strike.'

To what could these, and his ensuing words, possibly refer, but to his humiliating entanglement with Mrs. Van Buren?

But then, how had this same interview ended?

'I love no one but you,' he had declared; and he had drawn her to him, and held her in his arms. He did not, then, feel any affection for Mrs. Van Buren? or, was it possible for a man to be in love with two women at the same time?

So Lucy continued,—reproaching, pleading, extenuating,—as she walked behind her great-aunt's Quakerish black bonnet and fringed lilac parasol of past date, unconscious of these, as of all other visible objects.

By the time that she had made the entire circuit of the Common, and was facing Barlow Lodge upon her homeward way, Anthony Hepburn was absolved from all charge of duplicity or intent to deceive. She, herself,—lured on by a whole host of combining circumstances,—had been

the first to embark upon this miserable adventure. For this she was now being punished according to her deserts. Words were powerless to describe her wretchedness, and, even supposing that they had been forthcoming, to whom were they to be addressed?

Mr. Podmore's 'chaste' brougham was drawn up at the outer entrance of Palmyra House, and its proud possessor was standing just inside the gateway, drawing on a pair of tightly fitting lavender kid gloves. Miss Elizabeth prodded the bent back of the patient chair-man with her parasol, and the squeaking and grating vehicle came to a standstill.

Greetings of a friendly character were, of course, exchanged. Mr. Podmore had forgotten his keys, (it was explained,) and the faithful Hitchens had gone back to the house in search of them. Lucy, who had gradually encouraged in herself a feeling of positive repugnance to Mr. Podmore, purposely averted her gaze, after a polite but formal 'Good morning,' lest his round green eyes should discover her misery. Inadvertently she looked in the direction of 'The Aspens,' and the sight of the gateway which Anthony must have entered so often made her faint and sick at

heart. Turning her gaze for comfort in an opposite direction she encountered a face that seemed, somehow, to be familiar. An elderly lady, finding the pathway blocked, had, apparently, been obliged to diverge into the highroad, making the tour of Mr. Podmore's brougham. She had regained the pathway immediately to the rear of Miss Elizabeth's bath-chair, and was now looking back as though seeking for some one who should have followed her.

'Changie! Changie! Changie!' she began calling out, with an abortive attempt at a whistle.

It was the deaf and blundering old lady of the edible Chinese female dog!

Was it likely that she would recognise Lucy? It was a little over a year since they had met. During that meeting, however, they had been seated close together. They had conversed. The deaf old lady, as if to compensate for her defective hearing, seemed to possess a keen and penetrating eye, and Lucy's face was not one to be easily forgotten.

Yes; she appeared to remember Lucy at once, and she advanced, smiling, to the back of the bath-chair.

'Ah, my dear madam!' she exclaimed, effu-

sively, 'charmed to see you again after our agreeable railway journey last summer! "Changie" and I have been taking a little run upon Clapham Common;—am I right in supposing that we are neighbours? And your kind, good husband? I trust he is in the enjoyment of good health?'

'Changie's' voluble mistress—as is sometimes the case with deaf people—was in the habit of talking as though all mankind partook of her infirmity, so that it was impossible for Mr. Podmore to avoid over-hearing her remarks.

At the allusion to Lucy's 'husband,' and to her journey with him in the train, he pursed up his mouth with an expression which seemed to say,—

'How very reprehensible and shocking!' and, at the same time,—'I almost thought as much!'

Poor Lucy became suffused with painful blushes at the words of this persistent jumper at wrong conclusions. It seemed now to be too late in the day to say,—

'That tall gentleman was not my husband. He was no relation to me whatsoever. I had never set eyes on him before!'

'For why, pray,' (the old deaf lady might naturally rejoin,) 'should a young person like you

be travelling alone with a gentleman to whom you were not related? And, if he was not related to you, why in the world did you not tell me so before, instead of appearing to encourage me in my mistake?'

So it seemed quite a fortunate circumstance to Lucy that, just at this moment, 'Changie,' who had toddled off in the direction of the Cedars Road, should have fallen in with an ineligible member of the canine race,—a bold, big, mongrel 'of the baser sort,'—who appeared inclined to become far too familiar. 'Changie's' mistress, after a few incoherent words, flew off, brandishing her umbrella, in order to nip this imprudent acquaintance lest it should blossom and bear fruit; and all danger of an embarrassing explanation was over for the time being.

'"Your kind, good husband,"' Lucy repeated to herself, when she had gained the seclusion of her own bedroom. Words which might have filled her heart with such joy, and peace, and gratefulness to God! But, alas, seeming only a bitter and miserable mockery when they were applied, as now, to a cruel and unfaithful lover!

CHAPTER XVII.

Fifty times, at least, before the date of the Binks's dinner-party, Lucy was upon the point of writing to excuse herself from keeping to her engagement.

It was extremely unlikely, now, she said to herself, that Anthony Hepburn would dine in Wilton Place, and, even supposing that he should be there, what could such a meeting bring forth save pain and misery to them both?

But then Hope, which 'springs eternal in the human breast,' began whispering to her that, perhaps, after all,—who could tell?—some unexpected complication, some sudden turn of events, might delay, or for ever frustrate, this unnatural and ill-assorted union; that it would be some sort of consolation, at least, however matters were destined to end, to see him just once more before he was irrevocably bound to another; and that, supposing she failed to avail herself, through

cowardice, of this last opportunity for so doing, the memory of her faint-heartedness would probably haunt her all the days of her life. Finally, a second letter which she received from Adeliza Binks, decided her, come what might, to adhere to her engagement.

'I have not the least doubt,' her cousin wrote, 'that you received quite a "turn" upon reading, in the *Morning Post*, the announcement of the approaching marriage of one of your most devoted admirers; and to such an odd person, too; nobody that anybody has ever heard of, except me; and I had only suspected that she existed from a few *dark hints* which dearest Charlie has let fall, from time to time, in the course of conversation. Knowing, however, what base, inconstant wretches these men are (with, of course, one beloved exception!) I should not have been so very much surprised even if I had not had my suspicions; but I felt how awfully upset you would probably be, and meant to have written to you at once, but was prevented by a woman who came with most lovely nightgowns and delicious *peignoirs*, &c. &c., for my *trousseau;* and, as it happens, I am glad I did not fire off a letter upon the spur of the moment, for now, dear, I am enabled to throw you

a sort of *crumb of comfort!* Here it is:—Dearest Charlie ran up against the individual in question the other day, in Piccadilly, and at once asked him — in his frank, cheery way — whether he oughtn't to congratulate him? Whereupon he merely put on rather a surprised, "stand off-ish" sort of manner, and declared that he had no notion of what Captain Sparshott meant; and when dear Charlie proceeded to explain that he referred, of course, to the paragraph in the *Morning Post*, he said he had no idea whatever of how it came to be put in; so that Captain Sparshott thinks, after all, that it is quite possible the report may turn out to be an *entire fabrication*, although a certain individual did not positively deny it, and dear Charlie has several reasons for suspecting that it may contain a *germ of truth*. He looked, however, — Captain Sparshott says, — exceedingly "down on his luck,"—*anything* but like a person who is going to marry *for love*, and dearest Charlie, who is the very *essence of tact*, perceiving immediately—as he told me—that he had "put his foot in it," turned the conversation upon other subjects. But, I have no doubt that we shall be better informed by Monday, and know for certain whether it is "*to be or not to be!*"'

So, there was still just a ray of hope!

Colonel Hepburn had denied all knowledge of the terrible paragraph, and he had looked unhappy,—'*anything* but like a person who is going to marry *for love!*'

Lucy was too much of a woman not to feel a good deal revived by this piece of information. Unconsciously, too, she derived some sort of solace and encouragement from reviewing, in detail, Mrs. Van Buren's imperfections.

As she was not personally acquainted with her, she could only go by what she had heard; and the voice of rumour, she acknowledged, was not always very reliable. Still, it was evident from her appearance, that the occupant of 'The Aspens' was not a woman of much refinement. 'That vulgar, that magnificent, that insupportable woman!' These were the terms which the old French professor was wont to make use of regarding her, upon the rare occasions when he alluded to her at all. She was large and flaunting in appearance; she dressed, in all seasons, with unnecessary extravagance and ostentation, and her voice, at any rate when she sang, seemed to Lucy to be exceedingly shrill and unsympathetic.

How *could* Anthony Hepburn have cared for

such a woman? she asked herself over and over again, in her girlish ignorance of all the subtle influences, imaginary, as well as real, which may combine towards the beguiling of 'a young man's fancy.' How, if his nature was what she had conceived it to be,—proud, critical, fastidious,—could he have been in the least attracted by Mrs. Van Buren in the first instance? And how, assuming that he had been thus attracted, could he have felt afterwards, the slightest inclination for one so utterly different from this former object of his affections as was she,—Lucy Barlow?

For, it was evident to Lucy from the first moment of her painful enlightenment, that she must be different in every respect from her 'magnificent' next-door neighbour. Not, of course, *superior*, upon this account (she was not vain enough to encourage such a supposition), but still, certainly *different*, and, with a difference that she could not altogether regret.

There exists a natural tendency on the part of woman, when she finds herself in the sad situation of having been deserted, for another, by the man she loves, to dwell, for comfort, upon any defects which may seem to be apparent in her more fortunate rival; and she is even prone to anticipate

and forestall those which are, as yet, less fully developed. As, for example: 'There is an imperious look in her eye,' she will say to herself, 'which shows that she has been accustomed to command. How will he endure her tyrannies when he was too proud to yield to my entreaties?'

Or,—

'She is vain, ostentatious, extravagant: to *me*, he always preached humility, economy, moderation!'

Or, to descend to personalities,—

'She is too massive and unwieldy in figure; at forty she will have grown into a porpoise!'

Or,—

'What a rat-like and insignificant creature! By-and-by she will shrivel up like a mummy!'

Or,—

'I am told that she takes a very large-sized shoe,' and so on, *ad infinitum!*

Alas! poor struggler upon the stream of destiny, snatching so eagerly at these unsubstantial straws! . . . The man who has forsaken you, may desire, indeed, that the woman he has turned to in your stead, could become endowed with some of your many virtues and attractions! He may miss in her, of a truth, your slavish

submission to his will, your humility, your moderation, your trim figure, or your small foot! But *you*, yourself, taken and considered as a whole, he will neither miss nor desire! The tale is told, and the sands in the glass have run down. The tale that is twice told becomes wearisome, and the hour that has run out is done with and dead! . . . The sunshine of his love has departed from you for ever, and neither your own good qualities, nor your rival's shortcomings, will make it glow for you again! Least of all will he be touched by the manifestations of your enduring affection. He will make almost a grievance of the fact that it has survived his own. '*Ce sont de bien jolis vers*,' Louis XIV. is said to have admitted, after he had read poor Louise de la Vallière's harrowing verses of farewell, '*Mais, malheureusement, je l'aime plus!*' . . .

Whether to Lucy Barlow, or to Léonie Van Buren, belonged the better right of being classed with the deserted heroines of History, my readers will judge for themselves. Certain it is that, in Lucy's breast, there arose much of the bitterness and humiliation which is the portion of those who have loved and been deceived, and, by the time that Monday the 6th of July had dawned, her

recent experiences of man's inconstancy had made her feel at least ten years older.

Nevertheless, in spite of these painful emotions, she dressed herself with more than ordinary care, and it was quite impossible, she found, as she stepped into the hired brougham which her great-aunt had provided, to prevent her heart from throbbing and fluttering with hope. Miss Elizabeth Barlow, who was personally acquainted with the driver of the hired brougham,—a most respectable married man with a large family,—commended Lucy to his paternal care with many injunctions as to steadiness of pace, &c., &c., particularly when he came in sight of the railway bridges with their shrieking and flashing trains; seeing that his horse had, as she remarked to him, 'a very frisky and ferocious look;' and she conjured him, also, to be sure to be in waiting at the door of Lady Mabella's house in Wilton Place, at half-past ten o'clock punctually; and, moreover, to announce to Lady Mabella's servants that Miss Lucy Barlow's carriage had arrived. But still, as it was possible that Lady Mabella's dinner-party might not break up quite so soon, he was to be prepared to be kept waiting some time longer, perhaps; and as it was not to be

expected that Lucy would be home much before half-past eleven o'clock, by which hour it was highly important that Sarah, the parlour-maid, who, as well as Mrs. Pilchard, the cook, had to be stirring betimes, should have retired to rest,—'Here, my dear child,' Miss Elizabeth had concluded with solemnity, 'is the latch-key of the front door, and, also, the key of the outer door in the wall. I have never entrusted them to any living creature in my life, before; Sibthorpe' (the name of the driver) 'will wait, I hope, until you have opened the inner door, and pray be very careful to bolt it afterwards, both at the top and bottom, and also to fasten the chain.'

Lucy took the keys with a due sense of responsibility, and placed them, as she did not possess a pocket in her evening dress, in her bosom, where they would, of course, be perfectly safe, and attainable at a moment's notice, since the discomfort they occasioned could not fail to remind her of their whereabouts.

Sibthorpe, having been so earnestly entreated to be careful, set off at a snail's pace, although his horse was long-toothed and hollow-backed enough to have been deemed worthy of implicit trust.

Lucy, who was in a perfect fever of nervous excitement and anticipation, relieved the monotony of the first part of the drive by putting on her gloves and arranging her silver bangles, but although the gloves were fashioned to suit the exigencies of modern taste—that is to say, of considerable length, and took, consequently, some time to adjust and button, she had quite finished drawing them on before she arrived at the turn to the 'Cedars Road,' and then, again, all was fever and impatience.

'Will he be there? How will he look? What will he say, and how shall I be able to meet him with proper composure?' were the thoughts that kept on agitating her brain.

'Oh, *do* go on a little faster!' she exclaimed at length, tapping the front window of the fly, impatiently, with her fan; for she felt that it would be a great advantage to be amongst the first to arrive, instead of having, perhaps, to come tottering and faltering into the room under the gaze of those wonderful grey eyes! . . .

They were within sight, now, of the first of the railway bridges, and a train went dashing and screaming over it as Lucy spoke, but the long-toothed, hollow-backed one displayed neither

fear nor emotion. Sibthorpe, by desire, made a feint of applying the whip, without, however, producing any perceptible result, and by the time that they had arrived at Chelsea Bridge, she was in the last stage of feverish impatience.

But, at length, the river was crossed, and the snail-like animal, after turning to the right, just short of the Barracks, traversed Ebury Street, and made its way through Chester, Eaton, and Belgrave Squares, to Wilton Place.

The clock of St. Paul's Church only pointed to twenty minutes past seven when 'Miss Lucy Barlow's carriage' drew up at Lady Mabella's door, and by the look of consternation and embarrassment upon Upjohn's face, she perceived that she had arrived a good deal before the appointed time.

'Perhaps it is better thus!' she thought to herself, as she proceeded upstairs with a fluttering heart.

Upjohn, who, possibly, may not have been quite such a fool as he looked, coughed several times, in a marked manner, before entering the drawing-room, and rattled the door-handle.

Lucy was under the impression, at first, that the apartment was empty, but upon glancing

towards the back drawing-room, she perceived Adeliza and Captain Sparshott seated together upon the green velvet sofa.

'Gracious goodness!' exclaimed her cousin, starting up from her seat, 'you *are* early! Charlie has come half-an-hour before the time to help us with our arrangements, but we didn't expect *you*,' she added, in rather a tone of disappointment, 'until a quarter past eight, at least!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a terribly anxious moment for poor Lucy when the guests began to arrive in good earnest. Every time the drawing-room door was flung open her heart seemed to start off at a fresh gallop.

The party was to consist of twelve persons, altogether, Adeliza had informed her; 'rather a risky number to invite,' her cousin had added, 'as a thirteenth person—a relation, or somebody one couldn't help asking to stay on, was very nearly certain to turn up unawares; and so many people objected to thirteen!'

More than this, however, Lucy was unable to ascertain.

The family-party, so to speak, was already assembled—to wit, Lady Mabella, Algernon, her son (who was to assume the responsibilities of master of the house 'for this night only'), Adeliza and Captain Sparshott, and Lucy her-

self. Five persons in all; *ergo*, seven more were still expected. Would *he* be amongst them or not? . . .

It was evident that Lady Mabella, in spite of her habitual limpness, was capable of rising to an emergency, and of making, upon important occasions, the necessary effort.

'The mother has pulled herself together, wonderfully; hasn't she?' Algernon whispered to Lucy as his parent entered the drawing-room. 'You mustn't think that she's collared the family diamonds, but my Uncle Belmorris allows her to wear them for the present. If he's unkind enough to get married, you know, she'll have to give them up again!'

Lady Mabella, indeed, without looking positively handsome, presented, now that she was arrayed in the Belmorris family jewels, a very refined and distinguished appearance. She had disposed them about her head and ears, something after the fashion of a charger's trappings, mounted upon a structure of black velvet. Her dress was, of course, black, as usual, and of the same vague and indefinite form, but she had replaced the skimpy fringed shawl, so often associated with deserving penury, by a black

lace wrap partaking rather of the character of a *mantilla;* so that, although the little furrow of resignation to martyrdom was still upon her brow, she looked less like a distressed needle-woman than some 'wan cathedral saint,' who might have been prevailed upon to come to a London dinner-party, wearing her aureole.

Adeliza, aware of her mother's rooted distaste for all mental and physical exertion, had taken the chief responsibilities of the evening upon her own shoulders, and had now established herself close to the doorway, where she was busily engaged in conning over the names of the guests, which she had set down, according to their order of precedence, upon a scrap of paper.

How Lucy longed to know whether one particular name had been inscribed there or not! . . . Perhaps the whole idea was evolved out of her inward consciousness, and there had never been any intention of asking him to dine in Wilton Place! . . . The bare notion of such a possibility seemed almost to paralyse her with despair. What should she do,—having braced herself to this supreme effort,—if her hope of seeing Anthony once more were to evaporate into thin air? . . .

Lady Mabella sank languidly upon the sofa, close to Lucy and her varied emotions, whence she could command the doorway at which her daughter was standing. Captain Sparshott, with laudable show of devotion, hovered about his affianced bride, whilst Algy,—stationed at one of the windows,—was ready to give the very first intimation of the arrival of any of the expected guests.

The clock upon the chimney-piece struck eight just as Lady Mabella had finished buttoning her black kid gloves, and almost simultaneously, the same hour was more solemnly proclaimed from St. Paul's Church over the way. Within a very few minutes, Lucy would know either the worst,—or the *best*—(as it seemed to her)—that she could now hope for!

Her sense of hearing became so intensified that she felt as if she would have surely recognised Anthony's step even if it had pleased him to come on foot.

Almost before the church clock had finished striking, she heard the sound of approaching wheels,—grating and hesitating, as if the driver was considering the numbers of the houses,—then a carriage drew up at the door. It seemed, how-

ever, to be too slow and too heavy for a 'hansom' cab.

'Oh, I say!' exclaimed Algy from his post at the window; 'here *is* a rummy turn-out!'

Lady Mabella drew herself up for a moment, and assumed a more animated expression, whilst Adeliza gave a little start of expectancy. Captain Sparshott sauntered up to the window and looked out.

'Ah, I thought so!' he observed, quietly; 'it's the old family mustard-pot!' and he took up his position again by Adeliza's side.

It was, in truth, Sir Timothy and Lady Sparshott, in their old-fashioned yellow chariot. They had started from Wimbledon in good time,—seeing that their horses were fat and well-stricken in years,—and so had arrived punctually at eight o'clock.

Upon hearing of the arrival of 'dearest Charlie's' father and mother, Adeliza, also, flew to the window, upon a pretence of eager affection, but, in reality, in order to administer a sharp pinch to her brother, to enjoin discretion,—for the parent Sparshotts had almost as much right as their time-honoured equipage to be described as 'rummy,' and,—as the houses in Wilton Place

have the advantage of possessing a small garden between their front-door and outer-gate,—there would be every opportunity for observing them, as it were, 'in the open.' After these two first arrivals, the knocks upon the front-door fell thick and fast, until, by a quarter past eight o'clock, eleven souls in all,—counting both the guests and their entertainers,—were assembled in Lady Mabella's drawing-room. One person was still to come. Who could it be? . . .

Lucy, who was, by this time, in a terrible state of agitation, began counting over the company, in order to discover the probable sex of this lingering guest. Six women, and only five men. The belated one was evidently a male!

'Shall we go on waiting for him any longer?' Lucy heard Adeliza whisper to her mother.

'I think, dearest, we had better go on waiting,' Lady Mabella made answer.

'I should think we'd much better have up the dinner,' cut in Algy; 'he's evidently missed his train.'

'Don't you see that it'll put out all my arrangements if we don't wait, you stupid boy?' returned Adeliza in a tone of irritation; 'and that a lady will have to go down by herself? Of

course *you're* much too greedy to care, but *I* would rather wait on. You remember how late our train was the last time *we* came from the North!'

The train from 'the North!' . . .

A thrill of gratitude, as for a crowned hope, electrified Lucy's whole being. Probably he had been staying at Falconborough Park, and had only arrived in London that very evening. No wonder that he was a little late!

Adeliza now presented Lucy to a short, stout, elderly man, with gold spectacles and dyed whiskers;—'*Doctor*' Somebody,—but she was unable to catch the entire name. He began to converse upon a variety of uninteresting subjects—(*all* subjects, indeed, except *one*, would have seemed uninteresting just at this moment). She replied mechanically and abstractedly, for she was listening all the while, with a beating heart, for the coming of the expected 'hansom.'

After she had imbibed quite an exhausting dose of the doctor's platitudes, Lucy observed that Adeliza was again displaying signs of perturbation. She consulted the clock anxiously, compared it with that of the church, and then whispered something in her brother's ear. The

guests, having got through the ordinary amount of before-dinner small talk, relapsed, for the most part, into a languid silence, as though fearful of encroaching upon the supply which had been reserved for the enlivening of the repast itself,—for which it was evident that they were growing rather impatient.

'If you'll only ring the bell for dinner,' Lucy heard Algy suggesting, 'you'll see that he'll be sure to arrive directly. People always do.'

Thus adjured,—and seeing that it was nearly half-past eight by both the clocks,—Adeliza somewhat reluctantly rang the bell. Upon this occasion, at least, Algernon Binks proved a true prophet.

Almost before the bell had left off tinkling, a swift-speeding 'hansom' drew up outside,—with a jerk which brought one of the wheels on to the kerbstone with a grating sound familiar to all Londoners. Its doors were flung open with a bang, and a quick footstep was heard coming along the stone-paved way between the garden-gate and the front-door. The longed-for, yet terrible moment, had at last arrived! . . .

Poor Lucy, in a state of breathless emotion, leant eagerly forward, so as to get a good view

of the door, which was now partly obscured by the stout figure of the doctor.

'The *H*earl of Belmorris!' cried Upjohn, flinging open the door as wide as it would go.

Lucy would never have believed,—only a little while ago,—that she could have been so filled with bitter disappointment at the sight of a faithful and valued friend.

But 'human longings,' says George Eliot, 'are perversely obstinate; and to the man whose mouth is watering for a peach, it is of no use to offer the largest vegetable-marrow.'

Lucy Barlow was not a 'man,' any more than Lord Belmorris was a 'vegetable-marrow,' or 'large;' but the adage is applicable nevertheless, as it was his lordship's misfortune, at this particular moment to play 'marrow' to Anthony Hepburn's 'peach.'

He began by excusing himself on account of the lateness of the hour. The train from the North,—as Adeliza had surmised,—had been behind its time, and this had 'thrown everything out.' Then he drew his niece aside, into a corner:—

'So you've landed him at last!' Lucy could hear him whisper,—the overstrung condition of

her nerves having intensified her sense of hearing;—and he thrust a sealed packet into Adeliza's hand.

Lady Mabella next presented her brother to Sir Timothy Sparshott and his lady,—but before many words had been exchanged, Upjohn announced that dinner was served.

'Oh, do look, Mama!' cried Adeliza, who had by this time opened the sealed packet; 'what a beautiful diamond bracelet! . . . How very, *very* kind of you, my dearest Uncle! . . . I always said that I so much preferred jewelry to anything else!'

But the guests were waiting to be sent down to dinner in their proper order,—so, after one more admiring glance at her uncle's wedding-present, Adeliza proceeded to marshal them in couples:—

'Algy dear,—as master of the house,—will you take down Lady Valentina Winnington? . . . Dear Lady Sparshott, you have already made the acquaintance of our Uncle Belmorris? . . . Miss McTavish,—you behold your fate in General O'Reilly! . . . Doctor Winnington,—you are to take down my cousin, Miss Lucy Barlow . . . Charlie! you know that you have become *my*

property! . . . Sir Timothy, will you kindly give you arm to Mama?' . . .

Upon entering the dining-room, Lord Belmorris, who had not yet spoken to Lucy, beckoned her towards the place next to his own,—so that she found herself seated at the table between 'the Earl and the Doctor.' By this time, however, she was overwhelmed by such blank despair, that everybody in the room,—including the sporting nobleman upon her right,—seemed to be alike indifferent to her.

Until dinner was actually announced, she had been buoyed up by a thousand wild expectations, and had fixed her eyes foolishly and feverishly upon the drawing-room door, in the mad hope that, by some miraculous chance,—brought about by her yearning prayers,—the thirteenth guest, whom Adeliza had spoken of as 'very nearly certain to turn up,' at dinner-parties of twelve, might suddenly put in an appearance, and might prove to be the one whose presence she so eagerly desired.

But now, even this absurdly improbable hope (for upon such occasions it is not always possible to hope quite reasonably), had been finally blighted, and all was despair and disappointment.

Lucy's legitimate partner at the feast was that same Doctor Winnington, whose elopement only a year or two ago, with Lady Valentina de Bohun, had been a nine days' wonder. How different he was from the ideal doctor of Lucy's innocent imagination!

And how different, too, was that ideal,—stiff, formal, and unimpassioned, from what seemed now to her to be the only one admissible type of manly perfection!

The *real* doctor, as beheld in the real flesh,—of which he had an abundance and to spare,—was a being of another species altogether, plain, vulgar, and apparently consumed by a ridiculous vanity. Kind-hearted, perhaps, and possibly intelligent in his profession, but the very last person one would naturally have associated with a 'ladder of ropes,' and a clandestine marriage. But then, Lady Valentina was,—externally,—quite as unattractive as her husband; and had Lucy, at this moment, been in full possession of her critical powers, she might, perhaps, have given utterance (*mentally*, of course), to some such remark as that of the little girl, who, after looking on, in surprise, at the blandishments of two affectionate earwigs, exclaimed with disgust,—'Horrid crea-

tures! I wonder how they can be so fond of each other!'

The Doctor conversed to Lucy about the grand personages with whom he was intimate,—of the confidence they reposed in him,—of the delicate missions with which he was constantly entrusted by them,—and of their protestations of gratitude and eternal friendship.

She heard what he said, certainly, but only indistinctly, replying vaguely and abstractedly, as a person might reply in a dream.

Lord Belmorris, who sat upon her right, seeing her looking so intensely wretched, glanced at her with affectionate concern, but beyond begging her, sympathetically, to pass him an adjacent salt-cellar, and inquiring, in the same tone, whether the French roll which was set between them, was *her* property or his own; he was unable, during the commencement of dinner, to express his feelings in words, because of the amiable importunities of Lady Sparshott, to whom he had been told to make himself particularly agreeable.

By-and-by, however, whilst Dr. Winnington was complimenting Lady Mabella upon the deliciousness of her second *entrée* (a *replica* of that

same mixture of *crême de volaille* and rabbit, to which reference has been made upon a former occasion,) he took advantage of a crash of plates to murmur in Lucy's ear,—

'My dear child, what in the world's the matter? Is there anything I can do to help you?'

To which Lucy answered, gratefully, but incoherently, and speaking likewise, in a whisper,—

'Oh, no, no!—Indeed, you can't do anything! You would only think I was mad! Thank you a thousand times!'

'*Do* tell me!' he pleaded, earnestly; 'I might be able to do more than you think!'

But before Lucy had time to answer him, the Doctor, having finished singing the praises of the second *entrée*, turned to her again, and took up the thread of his narrative,—for she realised, now, that he had been narrating an anecdote of some sort for a considerable time,—where he had broken it off.

'. . . Well, now, to proceed: how do you suppose the noble lady in question behaves in this critical emergency?—for I don't mind telling you this much—(which won't be any kind of breach of confidence, for if you were to go down on your

knees to me, I shouldn't tell you her name!)—that she is a personage of the highest rank and distinction,—a *Duchess*, in fact,—though one of my very kindest and dearest friends, as I feel sure she will continue to be to the end of our existence in this wicked world,—well, how does this dear good woman proceed? "There's only one human being in the whole of Europe" (says she to the Duke), "who can possibly get us out of this infernal scrape" (I don't mean to say that these were Her Grace's actual *words*, but I give you the gist of them,—she made use of an expression very nearly as strong),—"because" (she was good enough to say),—"his wisdom, his benevolence, and, above all, his *discretion*, are known to be altogether without parallel, and you and I, my dear, have had, I *think* I may say, proofs of all three! This dear, good friend of ours,—who has stood by us in so many vicissitudes,—will help us now with his valuable judgment and advice, and will pull us out of this horrid mess if anybody in the world can; we must send immediately for our dear Doctor Winnington!"'

Lucy probably made use of such conventional exclamations as 'Yes!' 'No!' 'Really!' 'Oh!' 'Exactly!' 'Fancy!' &c., &c., &c., in their proper

places, for the Doctor continued his story without appearing to be conscious of her lack of interest. He succeeded, of course, in extricating his noble friends from their 'infernal scrape,' but how he managed it, and what was the nature of their 'horrid mess,' Lucy found, afterwards, that she had not retained the faintest notion.

Lady Sparshott, however, had seemingly grown jealous of Lord Belmorris's interest in his left-hand neighbour, for Algy, who sat upon her other side, was too much occupied with his knife and fork to make much effort to divert her, and she had taken quite a fancy to the sporting Earl, having been, as she was at some pains to inform him, a most enthusiastic sportswoman herself. Lord Belmorris, therefore, would have been prevented from continuing his sympathetic inquiries, even supposing that the Doctor had not resumed his wearisome story.

Lady Sparshott, previous to her marriage with Sir Timothy, had been a provincial belle of some reputation, and she retained, even now, in spite of a rather weather-beaten appearance, decided traces of good looks. It was from her, no doubt, that the Captain had inherited his sporting proclivities, and his knowledge of horse-flesh, since Sir Timothy, as his wife remarked during the

course of dinner, notwithstanding that he had been reared in the country, and, like his son, had entered the army at an early age, 'did not know the difference between a hunter and a chest of drawers.'

During the first portion of her married life, she had followed her husband's regiment both at home and abroad; and some of her military reminiscences were exceedingly racy and entertaining.

She had a way, however, excusable in an old campaigner, of calling persons and things by fine, simple, Biblical names, of conscientiously dotting her '*i's* and crossing her '*t's* which Adeliza foresaw might possibly make Lady Mabella feel rather nervous, particularly before company, for, with regard to such matters, she was somewhat over-squeamish and 'lady-like.' Upon Sir Timothy's retirement from the army, Lady Sparshott had resided with him at Sparshott Priory, County Tipperary,—the ancestral home of the family,—where she had devoted herself to dog-fancying and to the pleasures of the chase. In one of her hunting accidents, however, she had had the misfortune to break her leg,—complications ensued, which had necessitated a serious surgical operation,—in a word, 'dearest Charlie's' mother

was now the possessor of a cork leg. It was since the time of this occurrence that Sir Timothy, in order to divert his lady, who was now debarred from so many of her favourite amusements, had passed a portion of each summer near London. The atmosphere of the Town itself had been pronounced bad for the asthma, from which he suffered, but it was quite possible to enjoy a little polite society whilst living at Norwood or Wimbledon.

Sir Timothy himself seemed to possess less individuality than his wife. He was a large, heavily-built man, with a bald head, and a face like that of an elderly cherub. He spoke in gusty whispers, on account of his asthmatic affection, and puffed like a walrus after the slightest physical exertion. Lady Sparshott, whenever she was within hearing, answered for her husband, in order to spare him superfluous labour, for, although she was in the habit of speaking somewhat slightingly of him in public, and was wont to express great contempt for all prudish and strait-laced notions; besides, having been surrounded in her youth, by a crowd of military admirers, she was, in reality, a pattern of conjugal devotion, her 'bark' being (as Algernon

expressed it), 'a good deal worse than her bite;' whilst, as for 'calling a spade a spade,' this was done (in the opinion of her future daughter-in-law), entirely in order 'to shock people who were too particular, and give them a scare.'

Adeliza, who was seated at dinner between Sir Timothy and his son, behaved with commendable self-denial, neglecting her affianced in order to assist her mother in entertaining the wheezing Baronet, although she found it, as she afterwards remarked, 'most awfully up-hill work.'

Lady Mabella had not been 'taken down' by Lord Belmorris,—the personage entitled to pay this penalty of greatness,—because, as the reader may remember, he strongly objected, on account of the existing consanguinity, to be coupled with his sister during the whole of dinner, added to which, it had been deemed advisable, in the present circumstances, to yield the place of honour to Sir Timothy.

Captain Sparshott, as Lucy could not help observing, after a glass of the boasted Sub-Pantechnicon champagne had somewhat steadied her nerves, was much more silent and pre-occupied in manner than was his wont. Possibly, on account of his approaching alliance with the family of his

entertainers, he may have shared in some of their anxieties; or, perhaps, he was apprehending a more formidable outbreak of the paternal asthma; or a more than usually pungent anecdote from the maternal lips; or it may have been that Miss M'Tavish (the young Scotch lady who could sing old Irish melodies), who sat upon his right-hand, knowing him to be already betrothed, and, in consequence, as Adeliza had expressed it, referring to a different person, 'not of the slightest real good,' did not go to much pains to entertain him, but addressed herself chiefly to General O'Reilly, who had taken her down to dinner. The General, a dried-up veteran, who occupied an appointment of some importance, conversed a good deal upon military matters. Alarming news had arrived, lately, from South Africa,—our troops had met with reverses,—and the General's prophecies regarding coming events were listened to with attention.

Matters would become a good deal worse, he feared, before they grew better. The movement was of far greater importance than people seemed to imagine; the British reverses in South Africa would seriously affect our prestige in India: more troops ought to be sent out, and that at once.

'*Your* regiment won't have to go out, will it, Charlie?' Lucy heard Adeliza murmur to her betrothed. 'It seems only the other day that it came back from foreign service; surely they won't send you out again just yet!'

'No; I'm afraid they won't!' returned the Captain in rather a disappointed tone. 'Worse luck!'

'"Worse luck!" Oh, you naughty, unfeeling boy! . . . . Don't you call that a very hard-hearted remark of your son's, Sir Timothy?' and she turned playfully to the asthmatic baronet, whose reply Lucy was unable to catch.

'I must say,' the Captain went on, by-and-by, still speaking as with something of regret; 'I should like to see a little *real* fighting, for that business with the Afghans was merely child's play. Lots of fellows 'll volunteer, whether their regiments are ordered out or not;' and he twirled his dark moustaches reflectively.

'"*Volunteer!*" what a horrible idea!' returned Adeliza as though aghast. '"*Real* fighting" isn't intended for *engaged* people, is it, Sir Timothy? . . . . You must leave that to poor miserable, solitary wretches, who have nobody to care for them, or to men who have married un-

happily, and want to get away from their wives.'

'When *I* was a young woman, of about your age, my dear,' cut in Lady Sparshott, speaking across the table; 'I was only too proud to follow my husband wherever his regiment was ordered; and if everybody had had their rights, I should have gained my Crimean and Indian Mutiny medals as honestly as Sir Timothy. Girls were different, however, in those days, and weren't nearly so keen as they are now about their comforts. Many's the time I've slept upon the bare ground with nothing but a waterproof for my night-shift, for, whenever we were skimped as to our baggage, I always preferred taking out the weight of a camp-bedstead in something else. . . . But the worst hardships I ever went through in my life, was when we were lodged in so-called "comfortable winter quarters," when I and Sir Timothy had to cram into a bed only six foot by three. Never shall I forget the "B-flats" and the snoring of the men!'

Captain Sparshott, who had heard before of the discomforts his mother had endured upon the occasion to which she alluded, looked a little nervous and responsible during this speech.

He seemed to breathe more freely, however, after her mention of the 'B-flats,' perceiving that the calling of these little members of the *genus disgustans* by so polite a name, was a proof that she did not desire to ride rough-shod over Lady Mabella's susceptibilities.

Lucy's spirit, meanwhile, was wandering miles away, hovering over all sorts of varied scenes, to which she travelled with surprising velocity. Now she was at her bedroom window at Hampton Court, in the first early days of her infatuation, overlooking the glimmering river, with the cavalry barracks upon her right; in one of the rooms of which she pictured Anthony as he lay asleep, with his sword and sabretache slung over the bed-post. Now, she was seated with him upon the oaken bench near to the Haunted Gallery. She recalled, with the utmost vividness, all the sensations she had experienced, of mystery, of awe, of enchantment, upon that never-to-be-forgotten summer night; and of how, mingling with these, there had been a vague sense as of a consciousness of predestination and ominous historical coincidence; a fear, an inward struggle, a pleading for protection against she knew not what incomprehensible danger, which had seemed,

somehow, to be mixed up with Henry VIII. and Katherine Howard, and the cruelty and inconstancy of man. . . . And then, there were his kisses, to the accompaniment of distant music, and a murmuring fountain.

She could recollect every one of Anthony's words upon that memorable evening. 'When a man was "thoroughly tired of a woman"' (he had said, amongst other things), 'the kindest thing he could do to her, sometimes, would be to cut off her head;' and she remembered how, after this strange speech, he had sighed quickly, but for which, she would not have believed that he was in earnest. . . . *Whose* head would it be kind of him to cut off, now (she fell to wondering); her own, or Mrs. Van Buren's? . . . .

'You remember the three Miss Bolderos, Lucy dear, at Hampton Court, don't you? and our friend "the Vet?"'

It was the voice of Adeliza appealing to her across the table. Observing her cousin's abstracted manner, Miss Binks was desirous of recalling her wandering spirit. Lucy started—

'Oh, yes!' she answered; 'I remember them quite well; and I remember the "Vet," too!'

'Well, only fancy! . . . . Charlie tells me

that "Beauty" Boldero and he have eloped together! . . . . It's caused the greatest sensation in the Palace, as you may imagine. How could she possibly have liked such a little monster?'

'The "Vet's" a very good little fellow,' returned Captain Sparshott, loyally; 'and at Miss Beauty's time of life it doesn't do to be too particular. One has to take what one can get!'

'Do you really mean that she mayn't care for him?' asked Adeliza, assuming quite a shocked expression; 'but that she only wishes to get a husband? Well, for my own part, rather than marry any one I didn't care for, I'd go into a convent, or throw myself into the Thames!'

Lord Belmorris smiled at Lucy during the expression of these high-flown sentiments. He met, however, with only a very feeble response, for she had once more started off upon her travels, and was journeying rapidly to 'the north' by a train which is never behind its time. She had gone over in spirit, Anthony's stay at the Castle, and the library-scene at Falconborough Park,—Lord Belmorris's personality, the while, being but dimly shadowed forth, merely as a sort of accessory, or supernumerary person, when the voice of Lady Sparshott recalled her to the present.

'The mare slipped up backwards,' she was saying, 'and then set to and rolled over me several times, so that if I hadn't been made of pretty tough stuff, I should have been squashed as flat as a pancake. . . . My skirt was completely torn off me, and there I lay, in only my boots and "inexpressibles!" By-and-by, a young fellow rode up to my assistance. "I'm not a bit hurt," said I, trying to get up; but I found that I couldn't stir to save my life, and when I looked down, I saw that one of my legs was bent all the wrong way, like this:—" (she hastily dashed off a rough sketch of the position of the legs upon Lady Mabella's best damask table-cloth, with the point of a fork). 'It looked so odd,' she went on, 'that, at first, I couldn't help laughing, for I never felt a twinge of pain, only a sort of numbness. I can tell you a different story, however, when they began cutting off my high boots to make splints of! "Good Heavens, Georgie!" said Sir Timothy, riding up at the moment, "you do look a figure of fun, and no mistake!" . . . . "Fun or no fun," I answered, "they tell me I've broken my right thigh, and that it's a ticklish place for a smash. You may very likely find, one of these days, that you're tied to a

woman with a cork leg!" and, as it happened, my words came as true as Gospel!'

During this account of her ladyship's hunting misadventure, Captain Sparshott's good-looking face again assumed an expression of anxiety, and he appeared to be relieved when the anecdote was concluded, although he could not have failed to appreciate the motive which had induced his mother to substitute the word 'inexpressibles' for 'breeches.'

But at last this dinner, which seemed to Lucy to be so hopelessly interminable, came to an end, and the ladies proceeded to the drawing-room. Lady Sparshott, who graciously begged them, because of her lameness, to 'stand not upon the order of their going,' being assisted upstairs by her future daughter-in-law, last of all.

As soon as the gentlemen had finished their wine, the young Scotch lady turned to her old Irish melodies, and proceeded, as Algy had expressed it, to 'give tongue' vigorously.

Whilst she was singing to the assembled company in the front drawing-room, the back room was entirely deserted. Anthony would have had ample opportunity, supposing that he had been present, to have whispered a few tender

words of farewell upon the green velvet sofa. What was the use, however, of thinking, now, about what *might* have been? . . . .

Before 'Miss Lucy Barlow's carriage' was announced, Sir Timothy and his lady bade good night to their hostess, as they had so long a drive before them. Captain Sparshott, who had promised to sleep that night at Wimbledon, accompanied his parents, and all the pleasure of the evening was over for Adeliza Binks. One by one the other guests prepared to depart, and in another ten minutes, Lucy and Lord Belmorris were all that remained of the party.

Upjohn now informed Lucy that her carriage was at the door, and she, too, rose to depart.

'Oh, *do* stay a little longer, Lucy!' exclaimed Algy, forcing her back again into her chair. 'All those tiresome people are gone now, and we're just going to talk them over!'

CHAPTER XIX.

When the family were once more alone, Lady Mabella immediately assumed 'the recumbent position,' being, no doubt fatigued with her unusual exertions.

'I am glad that it is all over!' she murmured, as she sniffed languidly at her smelling-salts. 'Don't you remember, dearest Gussy,' she went on, addressing her brother, 'how poor dear Mama used always to say that Baronet's wives had so very often a decided touch of vulgarity, and that it was one of the things she was never able to account for? . . . I think dearest Mama was hardly *ever* wrong!'

'Rather liked the old lady, myself,' returned Lord Belmorris. 'Plenty of pluck, and all that, and yet just as tender-hearted as a spring-chicken. You'll be able to ride her on the snaffle, I should think, Addie!'

'I like her very much indeed,' said Adeliza demurely. 'She seems to be so very kind and good-natured; and I like Sir Timothy very much, too, although he wasn't very easy to get on with at dinner. I think I'm an extremely fortunate girl.'

'I'm sure I think so too!' exclaimed Algy, in his discordant tones; 'although you *did* hold your head so high when you first came out, and talked such "rot" about marrying a Duke! and I'm sure I hope Baronets' wives will have improved by the time that you're one yourself; you'll have to try and polish them up a bit, for I suppose we needn't go on pretending any longer that we fancy Charlie Sparshott's a second son, need we?'

'I must say, Algy, that you haven't got particularly polished manners yourself!' was all that Adeliza condescended to reply. . . .

'What can make them like this, I wonder?' murmured Lady Mabella dreamily, as she screwed and unscrewed the top of her smelling-bottle. 'I'm sure they usen't to be quite so bad! . . . They seem to have become much worse lately!'

It would not have been easy to make out, from her words, whether she was alluding to the degeneracy of smelling-salts or of Baronets' wives,

for it was her habit to wander from one subject to another without confiding her mental transitions to her listeners.

'They used to have a very strong pungent smell,' she went on, by-and-by, 'which made one's eyes water directly they were opened. The fact is, they are too much adulterated!'

'Ah! Mama is going to talk about her complaints and her remedies,' whispered Adeliza in Lucy's ear, 'which won't be at all amusing! Come into the other room for a few minutes; I want to give you a little advice before you go.' Adeliza led her cousin into the back drawing-room, and the two girls seated themselves upon the green velvet sofa.

'I can see, my dear,' said Adeliza, in a low voice, 'that you're not quite yourself to-night. You're unhappy about something. Has it anything to do with the paragraph in the *Morning Post?*'

Adeliza spoke much more kindly and tenderly than usual, Lucy thought. Now that she was evidently about to be sympathized with, it required all her fortitude to prevent her from breaking down and bursting into tears. She pressed her cousin's hand gratefully, but could not trust herself to speak. By-and-by Adeliza continued:—

'I'm sure it's about that, without your telling me. Well, I do assure you, my dear Lucy, that, if I were you, I would give up all idea of marrying *the individual in question*, and turn my attention to something more profitable! It's my firm belief that he's no good whatsoever, and that even if he doesn't marry this dreadful woman, he's irrevocably tied up with her somehow. Even dearest Charlie, who's awfully devoted to him, and wouldn't say a word against him to save his own life, confesses, now, that it's always been suspected in the regiment that he had something mysterious hidden away somewhere, although he wasn't the kind of person that any one could "chaff" about it. One can't expect, of course, that men can behave exactly as if they were angels, with wings sprouting out of the back of their necks; but still, there are limits to one's forbearance, and, in this case, I'm sure it would be much wiser to forget all about him. I don't believe that you're really *in love!*' . . .

'Ah!' . . . sighed Lucy, with a sad smile. This sort of sound practical advice, which is always so easy to give, seems often somewhat difficult to follow! . . .

'Without saying a word against him,' Adeliza went on, 'Captain Sparshott has told me several things about him, in the strictest confidence, which would have made my flesh positively creep, if I'd had any hopes of him myself! One day, for instance, at Hounslow, when he had been up to London, he brought back a large parcel with him, and left it on a chair in the mess-room. Dearest Charlie opened it, by mistake, before several of the other officers, and what do you think it contained? . . . An immense wax doll with blue eyes that opened and shut by pulling a wire!'

'A wax doll!' exclaimed Lucy. She was too unsophisticated to divine the new vistas of speculation which this discovery must have opened out to Anthony Hepburn's brethren in arms!

'Yes; *a wax doll*,' her cousin repeated, pursing up her lips. 'Dearest Charlie was so frightened that he dropped it as if it had been a scorpion, and he's afraid he must have damaged its nose; after which, he carefully wrapped it up again so that Colonel Hepburn shouldn't know that the parcel had been undone; and next day, he mysteriously disappeared, taking it with him, and saying something about running down from Saturday till

Monday to stay with a friend in the Isle of Wight. Now, wouldn't this have opened your eyes?'

'What, the wax doll? . . . I should have thought that he'd bought it as a present for his friend's child.'

'No doubt,' returned Adeliza mysteriously, 'and that child—was? . . .'

'Ah, I see what you mean! You mean that it was for Mrs. Van Buren's little girl, and that he was going to see her? . . .'

'You knew, then, that she had got a little girl?' said Adeliza, as though rather surprised.

'Yes; she happens to live quite near to us at Clapham; and I know, too, that the child has a large wax doll such as you describe.'

'You seem to know a good deal,' remarked Adeliza reflectively, 'and yet to be wonderfully unsuspecting! . . . When people are so terrifically "green" it's very difficult to advise them or put them on their guard! . . . Now *I've* never pretended to be innocent, or romantic, or anything of that sort, and I've made a point of checking myself if ever I felt inclined to be maudlin or sentimental, so I can only give you worldly, practical advice, because I've "gone in"

for being nothing more than a worldly and practical girl. All the same, it's impossible for you not to see, because everybody must see it, how utterly and entirely devoted I am to Captain Sparshott; and yet, I can assure you, if he were to behave to me as *a certain individual* seems to have behaved to *you*, to lead me on by paying me marked attentions, and then to trifle with my affections, and make me look like a perfect fool before all my relations, I should certainly not go about "wearing the willow," with a face half as long as my arm; and I've even said as much to dearest Charlie himself. I should dress myself in my best, and look as jolly as I possibly could, and show him that I didn't care one brass farthing, and flirt right and left, and try to take up, at once, to somebody else. I hope I don't shock you by my plain speaking?'

Before Lucy could reply to this question, their conversation was interrupted by Algy.

'Well, girls,' he exclaimed, 'I don't know what *you* think, but *I* think that it's not very good manners to get up into a corner, and talk secrets, and leave everybody else quite out in the cold! Addie's very fond of making out that I'm so selfish. I call this being selfish herself!'

'Oh, Algy!' cried Adeliza impatiently; 'I wonder when you'll learn to have a little tact! Can't you see that Lucy and I have got something to say that's very important?'

But their confidential talk was over for the evening. Lord Belmorris, perceiving that it had been interrupted by Algy, came towards them from the front drawing-room.

'Are you two young ladies going out to-night, to any of these scenes of dissipation?' he inquired. 'Can I be of any service as a chaperon? Miss Lucy knows what a good one I am.'

'I'm not going anywhere this evening, thank you,' Adeliza answered. 'Mama says that now my "prospects are assured," it's no use taking me out any more. You see, she's had a good long spell of it, poor thing!'

'And you, Miss Lucy?' his lordship next inquired. 'Not going to honour the world with your presence? I should have thought this beautiful "get up" ought to have been more extensively admired?'

Lucy had certainly taken more pains than usual with her personal adornment, but from no desire to court the admiration of the fashionable world.

'I'm not invited anywhere,' she answered; 'I don't know any of the people who give parties.'

'That's *their* misfortune,' he remarked, casting an admiring glance in the direction of the green velvet sofa.

Just at this moment, the clock upon the mantel-piece struck half-past eleven.

'Oh, I must go home!' cried Lucy starting up. She realized that Sibthorpe and his snail-like horse must have been waiting for quite an hour at the door.

She bade good night hastily to her aunt and cousins. Lord Belmorris, likewise, took leave of his relatives.

'I shall look in at the Club,' he said, 'and find out if there's anything fresh from South Africa.'

He offered his arm to Lucy, and they proceeded downstairs together, leaving Algy at the door of the drawing-room, looking a good deal disappointed. In his character of master of the house, he considered that it was his place to escort his cousin to her carriage. Prudence, however, forbade him to interfere with the will and pleasure of his Uncle Belmorris.

'You might give me a lift to the Club,' said his lordship when he had assisted Lucy on with

her cloak. '"The Travellers" isn't much out of your way,' he added, not,—alas,—quite truthfully.

Of course Sibthorpe had never heard of the Travellers' Club, and had no notion in which direction lay Pall Mall. He would have been an exceptional suburban flyman if he had.

'Drive down Piccadilly,' said Lord Belmorris, as he followed Lucy into the fly, 'and I'll direct you.'

Sibthorpe, having been instructed as to the situation of Piccadilly, they set off at a slow trot. It was one of those deliciously clear and balmy evenings which are rare in England, and above all, *in London*, even in the month of July. There was not a cloud to be seen in the heavens, the tail of the Great Bear, which made a flourish over the clock at Hyde Park Corner, was more than usually accentuated, and all the less familiar constellations and fixed stars were glittering and twinkling like diamonds.

The gates of the Park were soon about to be closed for the night, and crowds of people, the women arrayed in light summer clothes, were trooping out of them. The streets, too, particularly the thoroughfare through which they were

passing, were thronged with carriages. Lucy who had never been in the fashionable part of London in the season, and at night, was quite surprised at the animation of the scene. Even *here*, she thought, in the very heart of that great city which seemed so dim and murky when looked at from without, it would be quite possible to feel bright and happy, and contented, in certain enviable circumstances! . . .

Some such idea must have occurred, at the the same moment, to Lord Belmorris.

'How nice it would be,' he exclaimed suddeuly, as they drew near to a large house, the windows of which were brilliantly illuminated, and perceived the guests, who had been set down at the door, making their way in, under the superfluous awning; 'if only you belonged to me, and we could both go into the world together! What a different life!'

Lucy and her companion were, by this time, hemmed in, and encompassed, upon all sides, by a dense crowd of carriages,—for Sibthorpe, bent upon doggedly continuing his way, in spite of obstacles,—had plunged into the very midst of the string of equipages which were bound for the fashionable entertainment hard by.

His reckless defiance of all established precedent soon drew upon him the notice of the police, and he was precipitated headlong into the stream of public traffic, which was also much swollen and disturbed by reason of the party. Here, however, the hired suburban vehicle and its driver did not fare any better, being evidently regarded by cabmen and fashionable coachmen, alike, as neither 'flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring.' Several of the former made use of very insulting language;—the driver of a 'hansom' inquiring, sarcastically, where in the world Sibthorpe was driving to?—(only, as Dr. Winnington had said, when relating his anecdote about the Duchess,—this was rather the '*gist*' of his speech than his 'actual *words*'),—a question which was promptly, though rudely, answered by the driver of a 'four-wheeler,' and the probable place of destination as rudely indicated; whilst a vulgar young man, standing upon the back step of an omnibus, suggested that it would be far better for the 'common-weal' if Sibthorpe were to get inside his own conveyance, and be driven by his fare, a remark which was received with a good deal of rough applause.

Whilst they were being thus tilted at by

poles, buffeted by policemen, and sworn at by the drivers of public vehicles, it was quite impossible for the occupants of the hired fly, seeing the really imminent risks to which they were every moment exposed, to enter upon anything like a sustained conversation. By-and-by, however, they succeeded in extricating themselves safely from the crowd, and turned down St. James's Street, where the traffic seemed to be in its normal condition. Here, Lord Belmorris took Lucy's hand, and begged her again to tell him her sorrow.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that it has something to do with Hepburn's marriage?'

'His "*marriage!*"' she repeated aghast. 'Is he then married already?'

'Not yet, I fancy. But I read in some newspaper that he was going to be. You see, it was as I feared; he wasn't free of his fetters when he was at Belmorris. I should think better of him now, if he hadn't behaved as if he had been.'

'Oh, but he didn't!—he really didn't!' Lucy protested. 'I know from what he told me, that there was *something*,—*what*, I didn't quite know; but he made me understand that he wasn't free yet.'

'Ah, you defend him, of course! You're no doubt right to do so! I liked him once, and would defend him now, if I could, but I like *you* still better,—"*like*," in fact, is scarcely the word, —and so I can't help feeling rather sore about his behaviour. It might have happened, under *some* circumstances, that I should have been grateful to him for throwing you over,—from selfish motives of my own,—but, as things are, I can only remember that you may be made to suffer. Even Hepburn himself won't gain by his own recklessness; and I'm afraid a consciousness of *his* imperfections won't make you any the more indulgent to *mine*, will it?'

As he spoke, he leant towards Lucy eagerly, as though half-dreading, and yet longing, for her reply.

'I don't see that you have any imperfections,' she faltered; 'I only wish that everybody seemed as kind and good as you do.'

'Well, now, look here, my dear little Lucy, try and lay to heart what I'm going to say. Hepburn mayn't really care two straws for this Mrs. Van ——, whatever her name is, and yet he may be so bound to her, for there are probably ties between them of which you know nothing,

that he may consider himself pledged all the same to make her his wife. Supposing he marries her, and settles down with her, and you never set eyes on him again, are you going to pay him the compliment of remaining single for his sake all the days of your life?'

'I don't know,' she answered sadly; 'I haven't thought much about the future.'

'But it's high time you *should*, or that your friends should, for you! I don't mean to say that you're not young enough to wait, for you're a mere baby in most of your notions, but the old lady at home must be getting on in life. How old is your Aunt, Miss Elizabeth?'

'I'm not quite sure about her age: about seventy-six, or seventy-seven, I should think.'

'Then, she can't be looked upon as quite a chicken; and you've no notion whether she's made any provision for you?'

'No; she settles all her money-matters herself. A French gentleman, who comes to see us sometimes, told me that he thought she had been speculating lately, but I know nothing about it myself.'

'Is this French gentleman, who sometimes comes to see you, young or old?' Lord Belmorris next inquired.

'Oh, quite, quite old!' replied Lucy, smiling in spite of her unhappiness, at the idea which had evidently arisen in his mind.

His lordship appeared to be at once relieved.

'Well, now, look here, my child,' he went on, still holding her hand, and gazing earnestly at as much as he could see of her face; 'I've not lived over three-and-forty years in the world without knowing something about life, and there are many things which would seem to you to be uncommonly strange if you knew of them. *You don't*, however, as yet, and *I do;* and this places me in a position to advise. Now, one of the oddest of these things, is the way in which you young ladies sometimes shift and veer about after marriage. I've known cases where a woman,—after being so much in love that you'd have sworn she'd have broken her heart if she hadn't been "given her head,"—has married the object of her affections, and loathed and abominated, and thrown crockery at his head for ever afterwards. And then, there are cases where, having loathed and abominated him before, she's taken to him so kindly afterwards, that she's followed him about like a dog, and made herself quite foolish by exalting him into

a kind of hero. Now, how do you account for these seeming inconsistencies in your sex?'

'I can't account for them at all,' Lucy answered. 'As you say, I no doubt know very little about life as yet.'

'Still, you must know that these wonderful changes can't be brought about by simply going to church in a smart dress, and having a gold ring thrust upon your third finger by a man in a blue coat and light trousers, can they?'

'No; of course, there must be other causes: being so much together must make one find out one's husband's faults as well as his virtues. Sometimes, perhaps, he may have more faults than one expected, but still, I should think, one would forgive them if one cared about him, for *he*, too, would be sure to discover defects.'

'All you say is very sensible, but there's something more than this, which has nothing to do with virtues or defects. It partakes of the nature of a magnetic attraction or repulsion, and this is what really lies at the root of all conjugal lovings and hatings; but one doesn't always discover its tendency until, as you very wisely remark, with regard to mutual defects,—one has been thrown a good deal together. Now, this is what I find myself pinning my hopes to.'

'In what way can it affect your hopes?' Lucy inquired.

'In this way: as all lasting human affection depends, in reality, more upon this magnetic attraction than upon anything else, we are not absolutely the slaves either of beauty or of merit. Once a person possesses, for one, this mysterious charm, one thinks her beautiful, even if she's as ugly as sin, and tries to persuade one's self that she's good, and, what's more, one doesn't break one's heart if one finds out that one's mistaken, so long as one doesn't run the risk of being parted from her. That's how a man feels. Now, looked at from outside, simply as two individuals of the male sex,—Hepburn must always cut me out in everything; but how do I know whether,—just by way of compensation,—Nature mayn't have secretly thrown into my composition what I should value far more than anything else,—the power to make you care for me, if you'd only give me a chance of trying?'

Lucy felt deeply impressed with the truth of her companion's words. One did not need, she thought, to have lived over three-and-forty years in the world, to realise that life was fraught with unaccountable attractions and repulsions.

'Now, I can't believe,' he went on, after a pause; 'that such an attraction as I've always felt towards *you*, can be all one-sided. I'm not vain enough to fancy that you care about me a rap as yet, or that you've imagined it to be possible that you ever could. But, as I'm so much older than you are, I have a right to look on a-head, and consider what may seem like impossibilities to a person who only sees things as they are at present; and so I implore you to give me a chance of trying my luck, before I make up my mind that you're altogether out of my reach. Promise me,—promise me, Lucy, that you'll let me try?'

Poor Lucy was terribly embarrassed at this unexpected vehemence. She had nothing whatever of the heartless coquette in her nature, and felt real distress and remorse at having awakened so hopeless a passion in so manly and deserving a breast.

Those amongst my readers who are familiar with London, will know that Sibthorpe must, long ago, have driven past the Travellers' Club. He went steadily on through Pall Mall, utterly unconscious of the varied emotions of which his humble vehicle had suddenly become the theatre.

Lord Belmorris had pulled the check-string, unobserved by Lucy, when he had reached the turning to the Haymarket, and had directed him to the right,—past the Trafalgar lions, and so, on through Whitehall and Westminster, — to the Thames Embankment.

Lord Belmorris still continued his appeal in an impassioned tone:—

'*Why*,—if it was all to end in nothing at all,—did I feel what I did about you from the very first moment I set eyes upon you, that evening when I took you down to dinner at Hampton Court? How lovely you looked in your simple white dress! Do you remember that night, Lucy, and how we walked together through the cloisters to the ball, and how I picked up the flowers that fell from your dress? Look here!'

He drew from one of his pockets some sort of card-case or memorandum-book, and Lucy perceived what looked, in the uncertain light, like the mummified remains of the rosebud which she had gathered more than a year ago!

So tangible a proof of devotion could not fail to impress her, but the impression was painful rather than agreeable, bringing with it a sense of mortification and disappointment, as at the sight

of a good thing wasted and flung to the four winds. How differently she would have felt if Anthony Hepburn had produced from his pocket-book Lord Belmorris's faded 'button-hole,' which she had also worn upon that eventful evening!

'Oh, pray don't talk like this, I beg, I implore you!' she exclaimed in real distress. 'What *can* I do? What can I say? How could I foresee what has happened? I am quite miserable when I think that I have to seem to you to be so unkind!'

How many compassionate maidens, in like case, have given utterance to similar protestations!

'Try; do tell me you'll *try* to care for me just a little?' he made answer, speaking still with embarrassing earnestness. 'If I thought you could ever succeed I should be one of the happiest men in England!'

It seemed to Lucy, at this moment, that Sibthorpe was proceeding at a more uncertain and vacillating pace. Perhaps, she thought, this painful situation was about to be brought to a close by their arrival at the Travellers' Club.

She glanced over Lord Belmorris's shoulder to the right, and perceived, under the curved tail of '*Ursa Major*,'—who appeared, somehow, to have

become ubiquitous,—an imposing, though rather gloomy-looking pile. This was, probably, Lord Belmorris's favourite club,—one of those mysterious head-centres of forlorn bachelorhood of which she had heard so often. To the left lay the river, twinkling with the reflection of many lights, and forming, no doubt, a very convenient roadway for such 'Travellers' as chose to arrive from foreign parts by water.

'I think we must be just coming to the gate of the "Travellers'" Club,' she said, as she shrank back into her own corner of the fly.

Lord Belmorris, in spite of his emotion, could not repress a smile.

'That's Millbank Prison,' he said, following the direction of Lucy's glance. 'Your ignorance is almost as charming as your innocence!'

'Then we have gone past the "Travellers'" Club?'

'Of course we have, some time ago. We were in the middle of such an interesting conversation that I hadn't the heart to pull up.'

'And so you've come all this long distance out of your way!'

'I can't say the way has seemed particularly long to *me*, and I'm sorry *you* should have felt it

to be so! The fact is, I didn't like the idea of your driving so far, all by yourself, in the middle of the night, and so I thought I might just as well see you safely home.'

'*Home!* Do you mean to say that you're going all the way to Clapham?'

'Unless you object to my company, I was proposing to do so. I meant only to escort you in the capacity of footman, but fear I've been tempted to make rather a fool of myself. You must try to forgive me.'

'But the house will be all shut up!' exclaimed Lucy in consternation; 'and the servants gone to bed, and the candles put out! My aunt gave me the latch-keys so that the maids shouldn't have to sit up!'

'I can get on without either the candles or the maids, so long as I see you home. And look here, Lucy, I won't teaze you any more about my own feelings,—for you must understand them, by now, almost as well as I do myself. I daresay I've been a fool to speak of them again so soon. I ought to have waited till Hepburn got married and settled with his Indian widow, and then come forward and tried my luck! Remember one thing, however, whether, in the future, fortune favours

me or not, should you ever be in want of a friend don't forget to write to me. You know where a letter will always find me sooner or later, and though you mayn't care to be bothered with me now, you can't say what the years may bring forth. People are very fond of saying this kind of thing,—placed as I am,—but *I* really mean it. Will you remember this, and do as I ask you?'

'I will remember,' she answered, relieved to think that, by thus assenting, she could bring this embarrassing situation to an end. 'I don't know what I have done to deserve such kindness!'

Lord Belmorris pressed her hand as though in grateful acknowledgment. He was silent during the rest of the way, keeping well into his own corner of the fly, and Lucy almost fancied that, wearied out with his emotions, he had fallen asleep. He roused himself, however, when Sibthorpe drew up at the entrance of Barlow Lodge. 'So this is where you live, is it?' he said, looking up at the peaceful little Queen-Anne house which stood wrapped in slumber beneath a clinging mass of clematis and Virginian creeper. 'Is that your window which is left wide open?'

'Yes; my aunt sleeps upon the garden side for quiet, although she's getting very deaf, and

hardly any carriages go past at night. How are you going back to London?' she added suddenly.

'I shall pick up a "hansom" on the road, or walk, if the worst comes to the worst.'

'"Hansoms" are not easy to get at this late hour. Do let the flyman take you to a cabstand; there's one in the town of Clapham?'

'No, no!' he answered; 'don't trouble your head about me. I shall get home all right!'

They descended from the fly, and dismissed the trusty Sibthorpe. Lucy produced the two latch-keys, and Lord Belmorris opened the outer door with the largest of them; the one which had caused her the most discomfort in its temporary resting-place. Lord Belmorris came into the quiet little garden, and made as though he was about to unlock the front door. Lucy, however, notwithstanding her gratitude for his attentions, was now extremely anxious to get rid of her protector. Supposing, after all, that her aunt had decided to await her return, arrayed, probably, in a modest though somewhat unbecoming night-gear, might not Lucy's appearance, accompanied by a stranger, produce a terrible effect upon the old lady's nervous system?

'You must go,—you must go!' she whispered

therefore, holding the garden-door ajar so as to allow of his passing out. 'Thank you a thousand times for all your kindness! I hope you will soon meet with a hansom-cab. Good night!'

'Good night!' he answered sadly, holding her hand in both his own, and looking,—by the light of Mr. Podmore's flickering gas-lamp,—unutterable things. Then, before she had quite closed the door upon him and his aspirations, he pushed it open,—just far enough to admit of the passing in again of his hand,—and wringing hers, for the second time, he repeated the injunction so mysteriously uttered upon a solemn occasion,—by 'King Charles the Martyr' to the Archbishop of Canterbury,—'*Remember!*'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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